

how to steal a heart

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how to steal a heart

by [Yukari](#)

Summary

“Isn’t this exciting?” Minamoto said, his blue eyes shining so brightly that for a moment Sousuke just stared at him. “It’s like all the anime about phantom thieves and stuff like this! It’s a challenge, Mitsuba!”

“Definitely not for you, blockhead.” Sousuke simply finally smacked him in the face with his sleeve. “It’s for the teachers to deal with.”

“You’re no fun! We could investigate and find the culprit!” Minamoto insisted, leaning forward and grabbing him by the shoulders. “Come on, Mitsuba!”

“Do you really have to get so close to say this!?”

A simple detective story in which Amane and Nene decide to troll their younger friends to prove a very important point, and Mitsuba and Kou struggle to combine the two halves of their shared brain cell into one.

Notes

hello!! this is my first actual contribution to the fandom i've been stuck in for the past several months, and i had a lot of fun with it. it's not very serious, but we already have the serious stuff in canon, so i wanted to give these kids a break. i love Mitsuba and Kou so much,,,

the crime is discovered

“Hey, Yashiro. Doesn’t it seem a little too quiet lately?” Amane asked, leaning over the fence surrounding the rooftop and looking down at the school grounds.

“You’re going to fall if you keep doing this,” the girl sitting nearby replied. “And you think so, Amane-kun?”

“That kid has been ditching us a lot since the new school year started,” he said, ignoring her warning completely. “Do you think he likes that pink one?”

“Kou-kun...? Pink one? You mean Mitsuba-kun?” Amane nodded in response. “Of course he likes him. They’re friends.”

“That’s not what I meant, Yashiro,” he said with a frown, shaking his head. “You’re still such a kid.”

“W-What are you talking about? I’m not!”

“Eeeeh?” Suddenly, Amane jumped down to sit next to her with a smug smile. “You think you’re such an adult, just a while ago you kept falling for new people and you can’t even tell when your friend has a crush.”

“Why do I feel like that was supposed to be mean- Wait. No way!” Nene exclaimed, putting her hands on the boy’s shoulders. “Kou-kun likes Mitsuba-kun!?”

“I just saw them in the backyard,” Amane deadpanned, putting his hands over hers.

“Mitsuba-kun tripped over his own legs and the kid tried to catch him, but they both ended up on the ground and I can swear he hugged that pink loser for a moment.”

Nene gasped a little.

“Are they already dating?!”

“Are you serious? That kid got pushed away a second later,” he replied, poking her forehead with his finger.

“Oh, so he’s...”

“Yes, he’s...”

“...pining.”

“...a simp.”

“Kou-kun is a what?!” Her eyes widened to a comical size and Amane couldn’t stop himself from laughing.”

“Ask Hyuuga-senpai, he knows from experience.”

“But Kou-kun is nothing like that! And Mitsuba-kun would never abandon him to death.”

“Wait, Nanamine-senpai did what?!”

“That’s not important right now, Amane-kun! What’s the plan?”

They stared at each other for a moment, before Amane narrowed his eyes, smiling in a cat-like manner.

“Revenge.”

“Revenge for what?!”

“What do you mean what, Yashiro? For ditching us for that hot pink bitch named breakfast, obviously!”

“Can you please stop speaking in memes and take me seriously?” She asked, but was only met with a mischievous grin.

“That’s like me asking you why your legs look like radishes, Yashiro.”

“That’s absolutely not the same. I’m done with you being ridiculous, and I’m leaving. I want to spend my weekend in peace,” Nene said firmly, but Amane grabbed her hand the moment she stood up.

“Wait! Do you want to know the plan or not?”

“This is the second similar incident this week. What the heck is going on...?” Sousuke muttered quietly, draping himself all over Minamoto’s desk and looking through the recent photos on his camera. Some cat pics, a photo of an especially aesthetically pleasing milkshake... a photo of Minamoto that he forgot to delete but in the end decided to keep... Radish-senpai in the school garden... another picture of Minamoto. How many did he even have there? “Are you even listening to me, Minamoto-kun?”

“Huh? What’s up, Mitsuba?” His friend asked, raising his gaze from the unfinished math homework he was working on.

“You weren’t listening to me!” He said in an accusatory tone, waving the too-long sleeve in front of Minamoto’s face. “How dare you ignore someone as cute as me-”

“I’m listening now, though,” Minamoto replied, not even slightly bothered, catching Sousuke’s right hand before the sleeve could slap him in the face. “What is it?”

Covering his mouth with the other hand, he smirked at the other boy.

“First let go of my hand, you pervert, and then we can talk,” he said, snickering when Minamoto let go of his hand so fast as if it burned. He might’ve gotten used to his antics, but he was still so easy to provoke.

“Why do you have to keep saying stuff like this!?” Minamoto almost yelled.

“Because you keep being a weirdo, you stupid lame traffic-safety earring boy! I bet that if I didn’t defend myself, you’d-”

“I see you two are getting along, like always.” Satou interrupted their usual routine, approaching their desks, with Yokoo accompanying him. “I thought you’d be more worried, Mitsuba-kun.”

“Worried? About what?” Minamoto asked, and Sousuke sent him a glare.

“You’d know by now, if you listened to me from the beginning.”

“Apparently there have been two incidents of someone breaking into club rooms and stealing some items...” Yokoo said. “These rooms aren’t really close to where the photography club stays, but I thought Sousuke might be worried.”

“Mitsuba...?” Minamoto muttered, looking more concerned than he should, so Sousuke obviously had to do something to make him stop worrying.

“Why should I be bothered by that? It’s not like I’d leave my camera in that dirty room. And I don’t care about what everyone else is doing,” he grumbled, going back to staring at the camera’s screen.

“Of course, you’re so obsessed with it that you would never leave it at school.”

“Wha-!?”

“You should take this more seriously! What about your clubmates!?”

“This is exactly why I tried to talk to you, but you didn’t listen to me!”

“Oh,” Minamoto muttered, as if he only realized it now. Why was he so dense. “I’m sorry. Okay, my fault.”

“Lame,” he said in response. “Still... What is this all about?”

“Well, it’s definitely not a coincidence,” Yokoo replied. “Whoever is behind it, they’re clearly looking for attention.”

“Haaah? Only an idiot or a weirdo would do something like that! Don’t tell me they leave notes, or something similar?”

“Oh, but they do.”

“Seriously!?” Minamoto and Sousuke exclaimed at the same time, though one with disgust, other with excitement.

“What are you so happy about?!”

“Isn’t this exciting?” Minamoto said, his blue eyes shining so brightly that for a moment Sousuke just stared at him. He could be surprisingly cute in his enthusiasm... not that he’d ever tell him that. “It’s like all the anime about phantom thieves and stuff like this! It’s a challenge, Mitsuba!”

“Definitely not for you, blockhead.” Sousuke simply finally smacked him in the face with his sleeve. “It’s for the teachers to deal with.”

“You’re no fun! We could investigate and find the culprit!” Minamoto insisted, leaning forward and grabbing him by the shoulders. “Come on, Mitsuba!”

“Do you really have to get so close to say this!? Pervert! Stop touching me however you like!”

“I’m glad everyone has already gotten used to this, anyone outside of our class would already be calling the teacher,” Satou sighed. “What are you two gonna do?”

“Nothing-”

“Find the thief! Right, Mitsuba?”

“How do you even want to do that?!” Sousuke asked, pretty much on the verge of tears. He didn’t want to be involved in this. He was a tiiny bit worried about what would happen if they let the thief run around freely, but he definitely didn’t want to play a detective. He preferred to stay out of the trouble.

“I don’t know yet!” Minamoto exclaimed. “We’ll go to my place after school is over and think of a plan. You don’t have club activities today, right?”

“W-What, you want to drag me to your house so we’re all alone and then-”

“Tiara will be there. Also, I’ll make dinner.”

“Dessert too?”

“If you want it,” the blonde boy said with a grin, and Sousuke decided to stop pretending he didn’t want to go. He’d been to Minamoto’s place many times already, it was slowly beginning to feel like a second home to him.

“Then I’ll come,” he replied with a similar smile.

“Eeeh? So it means Mitsuba-kun agrees to playing detectives with Minamoto-kun? Unexpected,” Satou commented, making him realize his mistake. “Is he slowly converting you to his ways?”

“W-What?! No! I didn’t agree to that!”

“Come on, Mitsuba! I’m going to need you,” Minamoto said, grabbing his hand once again. “Someone will have to take photos to document the evidence, and there’s no one better for this job than you!”

Taken a little off guard by the sudden praise, Sousuke didn’t even pull his hand out of Minamoto’s hold, feeling a blush spread on his face. It’s not like he didn’t know his photos were good and all, but...

Hell, he liked being praised. Especially by someone he considered his best friend.

“Fine,” he muttered in the end. “But if you get us in trouble, I’m going to drop your lame ass to deal with it alone.”

“They’re so easy to figure out,” Satou said, and Yokoo just nodded.

“Yep, yep. Also, you wouldn’t do that, Sousuke. Leave him alone with the consequences, I mean.”

“Shut u-”

“So it’s decided! Man, I can’t wait for classes to be over already,” Minamoto said, his smile so bright that Sousuke just simply gave up. Maybe he did have a soft spot for him. So what of it?

And maybe he was a little excited to be spending more time with him. Maybe any excuse was good.

Kou liked bringing Mitsuba to his house. He knew that his friend often stayed alone at home, since his mom worked until late, and there was enough space for one more skinny person at his place, especially when Teru was busy with student council stuff again and it was just Kou and Tiara, whom Teru simply picked up from daycare and then left for Kou to entertain.

Speaking of Kou's little sister...

"Tiara-chan!" Mitsuba called out to the little girl when she came to greet her brother home, extending his arms to her.

"Mitsuba-chan!" She responded with a smile, running straight into his embrace as he picked her up from the ground. He'd most likely put her back on the floor in a few seconds, as he had the strength of a newborn deer, but it was the gesture that counted.

Kou smiled to himself a little, watching Tiara squeeze Mitsuba in a hug. She was the only person he knew of that Mitsuba would just let do this without complaining. He didn't get along with Teru at all, but for some reason Tiara was his best friend. Sometimes Kou thought he liked her more than him, but... it's not really like it was an issue, as long as everyone was happy in this deal, and both Mitsuba and Tiara seemed to be having fun.

“How is the cutest girl in this house doing?” The boy asked. He rarely, if ever, called anyone besides himself cute. This was an amazing thing on its own.

“Good! I’m the only girl in this house though,” Tiara replied cheerfully.

“Doesn’t matter! You’re much cuter than your ugly and stinky brothers.”

“Mitsuba-chan is really cute too! But Teru-nii and Kou-nii are not ugly or stinky... Actually, Tiara looks so much like them!”

“Right, everyone always says Tiara looks like a small me,” Kou said. “How can you call her cute, and then say I’m ugly?”

For a moment Mitsuba just stared at him, then looked at Tiara, then back at him and smirked before sticking his tongue out.

He could be so annoying sometimes.

Mitsuba eventually put his sister back on the ground and let her run off back to her room. She was going to join them later for dinner anyway. And for now...

“Okay, let’s go to my room!”

“Ah, scary!” Mitsuba twisted his expression into his signature annoying grin, covering his mouth with the loose sleeve. “Maybe I should call Tiara-chan back? Being alone with you makes me feel scared that you’ll finally decide to take advantage of me-”

“The way you keep saying this, I’m starting to think that’s what you want,” Kou let out a tired sigh, passing by Mitsuba on the way to his room. If he looked at him now, he’d see that his face turned the color of his hair. “Just shut it and come with me. You know I wouldn’t touch you.”

“Yeah... I know,” me muttered, but followed him.

Mitsuba always made so much noise, but the moment they entered the room, he made himself at home and flopped onto Kou’s bed like it was his own.

“Alright! Let’s get this started.”

“What exactly are you planning on doing? Not to insult your intelligence, but I can’t really imagine you as a detective,” Mitsuba said, watching him turn to his closet and start looking for something inside.

“Not to insult my intelligence? You just did it,” Kou replied. “Also we just first need... Ah, found it!”

With that, he pulled a box out of the bottom of the closet and sat down on the floor with it. Obviously curious, Mitsuba also relocated to the floor, peeking over his shoulder.

“What’s inside?”

“Our halloween costumes from last year!” Kou exclaimed, taking the lid off. “Last year we all dressed up as detectives, since it was Tiara’s obsession back then...”

“Wait, you can’t possibly want to make me wear something like tha-”

“That’s what I’m gonna do, yeah!” He said, and before Mitsuba could run away he put one of the hats on his head, firmly enough so it didn’t slip off.

“H-Hey! How dare you mess with my hair! Is that something you enjoy?! Do you want me to let my hair down so it’s easier to grab it?!” The other boy whined, and Kou could already hear his voice tremble. So quick to cry for literally no reason... Mitsuba reached forward blindly, picking the other hat, trying to forcefully push it onto Kou’s head and tripping in the process, sending them both to the floor.

“Can you like, chill for a moment!?” Kou asked, still trying to wrestle him.

“After what you did to me?! Of course no!”

“I literally...” He said, grabbing Mitsuba in half and simply launching the boy to the side, as he weighted probably way too little. “...didn’t do anything!”

Mitsuba went still the moment they ended up on their sides, with Kou loosely holding onto him. He was so quiet that Kou began to worry he did something wrong, actually. Mitsuba didn’t really like to be touched - it stayed with him as a memento of the times when he used to get bullied for stupid reasons. They did a lot of teasing, poking or playful pulling with each other, and Mitsuba told him he was alright with that, so Kou usually wasn’t worried, but right now... maybe he did go too far...

Mitsuba’s bangs fell to one side, revealing both bright pink eyes staring at him, and right now he could definitely see the blush on his face. He was always going on about how cute he was, to the point of driving other people mad, but... Kou really couldn’t deny that he was, indeed, cute. Mitsuba really looked like a girl, with his long hair, big eyes, long lashes and smooth skin... Well, he was still undeniably a boy, but a very cute one, and Kou never expected himself to say that about another guy. Sometimes he was catching himself wondering if it was a weird thing to think, but... he really was cute, and it’s not like he was alone in thinking that. Nene thought so too.

He wasn’t sure why he was thinking about it now, while still pretty much holding the flushed Mitsuba. He also wasn’t sure how it was possible that he still didn’t get kicked away.

“Why are you so loud, Kou-nii, Mitsuba-chan-” Tiara said, sticking her head into the room. “Ah, you’re just hugging. Tiara was a little worried.”

“W-We’re not hugging!” It was only now that Mitsuba pushed him away violently, trying to get back to his feet but failing pathetically. Despite being cute, he wasn’t graceful at all. Could clumsiness be counted as a part of someone’s charm? “Y-Your brother is being too forceful with me again!”

“Kou-nii, be nice to Mitsuba-chan!” She said cheerfully before leaving again.

For a moment, they just stared at each other, before Mitsuba smirked again.

“I bet you wish she didn’t interrupt you.”

“Keep dreaming. Also, wanna put that hat on me, or should I do it myself in the end?” Kou asked, ignoring that remark, and Mitsuba just sighed, reaching for the earlier dropped piece of clothing.

“Here you go,” he said, putting it on Kou’s head with surprising gentleness. “Just so you know, you look ridiculous. Not cute at all.”

“Yeah, because you are so cute that you have the right to judge me,” Kou replied, hoping the sarcasm was easy to notice.

“Of course I am!” The other boy exclaimed proudly, fixing his own hat on his head and smiling mischievously. “The cutest detective in the world, Mitsuba Sousuke, on the case!”

Kou suddenly thought it was way more adorable than it actually should be.

“Glad to know you’re finally taking this seriously,” he said with a grin instead of saying what he was actually thinking. He wouldn’t give him that satisfaction.

“I still think this is stupid, but these accessories aren’t so bad,” Mitsuba muttered, pulling a detective cape out of the box. “And I look cute wearing whatever anyway.”

The one he picked was the smaller one, originally belonging to Kou. It seemed like Kou was stuck with Teru’s, but that’s probably better... Mitsuba was only a little shorter, but had a smaller build in general. And he would probably be more comfortable knowing it wasn’t Teru’s. He put it around his shoulders, then crawled towards the mirror in Kou’s closet and smiled happily at his own reflection.

“Here, take this,” Kou said, pulling a magnifying glass out of the box and handing it to him.

“Huh? Oh, this is...” Mitsuba took it, raising it to the eye that wasn’t covered by his hair. “Why are you staring at me like this? Creep.”

“For someone who keeps protesting, you really seem to be having fun,” he sighed in response. “If we’re done with this, time to create a plan!”

“Wait, you actually have any ideas?!”

“Nope! I was hoping you’d have some though.” He reached for an empty notebook and a pen from his desk, then came back to the floor.

“Haah?! Are you an idiot, Minamoto-kun?!”

“I don’t know, are you?”

For a moment, neither of them dared to break the silence that fell after those words.

Then, they both began to laugh, and Kou thought that maybe both of them were idiots.

“Okay! Give this to me,” Mitsuba said once they calmed down, taking the pen from Kou’s hand and pulling the cap off with his teeth. *Gross*. “If we’re seriously doing this, we should start from scratch, aka asking the victims. You’re gonna do it.”

“ *We* are gonna do it.”

“No no no, I don’t want anyone to know I’m involved in this too-”

“I asked you for help for a reason!”

“Oh, right. Photos,” Mitsuba muttered, writing down the first point of their plan. “Fine! I’ll go with you, but you do the asking. Photos are my thing.”

“Sure!” He grinned at him. “We should get photos of those notes.”

“Mhm. And if we can, determine when the incidents took place... Probably after school, but we need to make sure.” Mitsuba also noted that down. “I won’t be surprised if there’s more victims, and if there are, we’ll have to draw a connection... What? Why do you look so surprised?”

“N-Nothing!” Kou said. “It’s just... you’re actually really smart when you try, huh...”

“What is this supposed to mean?! I’ll leave you alone with this!” Mitsuba just smacked him in the face face with his sleeve again.

“I d-didn’t mean anything bad, hey! You can’t really tell that just by looking at your grades! But I guess you really are so obsessed with your camera that you don’t pay attention to school...”

“With every word you say, you’re just making your situation worse!” His friend said, reaching out with the pen and sticking it to Kou’s nose.

“Wuaah, stop, stop, this pen doesn’t come off easily!”

“Good,” Mitsuba snickered, going back to writing on the page. “If we manage to find some pattern, we could lure them into a trap...”

Kou smiled a little, seeing how into this whole plan Mitsuba actually was. He was a crybaby and a coward, but when he set his mind on something, he could be surprisingly determined.

“Wait. What is this?” The boy asked, peering into the box once again, then pulling something out.

“Ah, this? Handcuffs. Tiara insisted a detective can’t catch criminals without them. It’s just a toy though,” Kou replied, but he really didn’t like the smug grin that appeared on his face as he picked the keys up too.

“Oooh, handcuffs? Kinky,” he said. “Almost like in porno. Is this what you’re into, Minamot-”

He didn’t even finish that sentence before Kou silenced him with a chop to the head, not hard enough to actually hurt, but enough to make his dramatic self cry again.

Even after they were done with their initial planning (honestly, Sousuke did most of the job anyway, what was Minamoto even thinking?), he still stayed at his friend’s place until late. He even offered to help making dinner, he wasn’t a total freeloader, but like always Minamoto just told him that since he was a guest, he should just wait. Sousuke wasn’t really that bad in the kitchen, he was definitely better than the older Minamoto, even if still not the best, but... he didn’t mind being spoiled a little, and Minamoto’s cooking was just objectively better than almost anyone else’s. Even his mom couldn’t compete with him, but he never told that to either of them.

“How long until it’s done?” He asked, happily trying to get the rest of the chocolate cake batter out of the bowl using his finger while sitting on the tabletop. Minamoto would always let him do this, if he was making sweets the day Sousuke was at his place. He said it was because Tiara was not allowed to eat too much sugar-

(“Are you saying that you don’t care about my health, Minamoto-kun!?”

“That’s not it, dumbass! You’ll be fine, just eat it!”)

-but he knew the truth. It wasn’t that hard to notice Minamoto was making the sweets for him in the first place.

“Have some patience,” the boy sighed, sitting down next to him. “We just put it in the oven. Eat your batter.”

“If my stomach hurts after this, it’ll be your fault.”

“I’ll give you some medicine then.”

“At least nurse me back to health, idiot,” he muttered, sticking more chocolate batter into his mouth.

Minamoto glanced at him, then turned back to staring at the oven, looking as if he was thinking about something very hard.

“You live kinda far from me, so if you got sick this could be a problem,” he finally said. “But sure.”

“Huh?” Sousuke’s eyes widened as his friend just grinned at him.

“Your mom is forever busy, so who else would look after your clumsy ass?”

“Can you for once be caring towards me without insulting me right after?” He grumbled with a scowl, knowing that Minamoto was right. He still felt his cheeks heat up though. He was probably the only person who’d ever agree to do something like that for him.

“I don’t know, can you?” Minamoto replied, sticking his finger into Sousuke’s bowl and getting it smacked away.

“Not this again!”

That’s when the front door opened, and just a few seconds later they could hear Tiara’s footsteps, as she ran towards the entrance.

“Welcome back, Teru-nii!”

“I’m home... I’m smelling something nice. What kind of occasion is this?”

“Mitsuba-chan is here, so Kou-nii is making a cake! I’m sure there’s enough for Teru-nii too.”

“Oh... I see... Well then, I can’t wait.”

Hearing the tone in which the older Minamoto said that last sentence made Sousuke shift closer to his friend, as if sticking close to him would protect him from the scary older brother that just came home.

“Ah, Teru-nii!” Minamoto seemed unaware of how he felt though, simply greeting his brother. Thank god he at least didn’t move from his spot, Sousuke could at least still hide behind him. Somewhat, at least.

“Good evening,” he muttered awkwardly when Teru entered the kitchen. The older boy seemed to notice the tension right away, and the forced smile that appeared on his face only contributed to that.

“Hello, Mitsuba-kun. I didn’t expect to see you today.”

“I invited him! We had something to do,” Minamoto said cheerfully. He most likely wouldn’t notice if... he grabbed the loose material of his shirt on his back. So he did it. He felt a little pathetic, but what Minamoto didn’t notice, Minamoto couldn’t judge him for.

He knew that Teru wasn’t a bad brother, even if he was useless and Minamoto had to do everything around the house, like cleaning or cooking. He was still the responsible older sibling who’d take care of his younger brother and sister whenever their parents were absent because of work. Sousuke was an only child who stayed home alone a lot too, so he was sort of jealous.

But there was the thing. Teru didn’t like Sousuke, and was also kind of scary. He didn’t like when anyone bothered his siblings, and since Sousuke wasn’t exactly the nicest person around, he probably thought he was going to get his brother in trouble.

Sousuke never wished for any trouble, and this only made him feel like a nuisance. He wished he wasn't so sensitive about this, but... he never really had an actual friend before Minamoto. Someone who'd accept him the way he was, without claiming he was 'too much', 'too annoying to keep around', or that he needed to change. He was kind to him and played along with his eccentricities, and Sousuke wanted nothing more than for nothing to change. Minamoto was really important to him, and knowing that someone thought he shouldn't be involved with him...

"I hope you managed to get it done, whatever it was," Teru said. "Leave something for me. The cake, I mean."

"Sure thing!" Minamoto replied before his brother left the kitchen and Sousuke could breathe normally again. "Mitsuba...?"

Shit. He noticed.

"Anything's wrong?"

"Stupid, why would there be anything wrong?" He muttered, but he was suddenly no longer interested in his bowl. "He'd probably prefer it if I wasn't here though, so it's him who has a problem."

"Huh? You mean Teru-nii?"

"Who else? Definitely not Tiara," Sousuke snorted a little, covering his mouth with a sleeve.

"Oh." Minamoto let out a tiny sound of realization. "Does it matter though?"

"What?"

"Does it matter, what Teru-nii thinks? I want you here," he said, looking not embarrassed in the slightest, as he placed one hand on Sousuke's head, as if petting him.

He himself felt as if he was about to explode, if he had to be honest. He hoped the other boy didn't notice how his face was definitely red.

"A-ah, so that's what you're into? You d-don't even mind that someone's listening, as long as you can have your way with the poor little me-"

This him earned him a chop to the head, instead of the gentle touch. Actually, it was fair. But still.

"What are you doing?! I'm not the one at fault here-"

"Yeah, yeah. Hey, Mitsuba?"

"Hmm?" He hummed, massaging his head, even though that didn't really hurt much.

"Want me to walk you back home? Like I said, it's kinda far, I'd feel bad letting you go alone," Minamoto said.

Did he just really... offer him to walk him home?

“What, you think someone as cute as me shouldn’t walk alone in the evening because it could be dangerous?” He asked innocently.

“Mhm.”

W...What?

“...did you just admit you find me cute?”

Maybe that’s where he crossed the line. Maybe he shouldn’t have asked this, because he didn’t even get a response, and instead Minamoto only stared at him with wide eyes, his cheeks turning red.

He should tease the crap out of him for this reaction, but he couldn’t, because his own reaction was too similar to this.

“Y-You don’t have to do that,” he finally said, suddenly interested in the bowl again. “My mom will pick me up on her way home. I texted her already.”

“A-Ah, I see...”

“But if you want to act as my bodyguard so much, I’ll let you do that another time,” Sousuke muttered, and he hated how he couldn’t even use his usual cocky tone for this.

Why? Because he might’ve had a hopeless crush on his best friend, and this was actually making him a tiny bit happy.

“I-I only offered because I forgot your mom can pick you up, don’t be stupid!” Minamoto protested right away. “It’s not like I’d have fun walking back home alone!”

“No taking it back!” Sousuke stuck his finger into the bowl again and then poked Minamoto's cheek with it, smearing the chocolate on his face.

“Ugh, you’re so gross sometimes!”

“You just called me cute a moment ago!”

“I’m taking that back too!”

“You can’t really deny the facts, Minamoto-kun. Give up.”

In the end, his friend was right. What Teru was thinking didn’t really matter, since he wasn’t the one he was friends with. As long as he had him... as long as Minamoto wasn’t tired of him, things were alright.

Also, Tiara liked him too.

“So, tomorrow we start the investigation?” Sousuke asked, before Minamoto tried to protest again. “I have club after school, should we start in the morning?”

“Guess that’s the only choice we have,” the other boy replied. “Let’s meet up earlier than usual! I can also wait for you until you’re done with the club stuff. I’ll just hang out with Nene-senpai and Amane in the meantime.”

Ah. Them. He couldn’t say he wasn’t a little jealous whenever Minamoto would run off to them, but... he was often invited to hang out with them, too, and they weren’t really that bad. Well, Amane was questionable, but he was way better than his twin brother, and Radish-senpai... he actually liked her, she was fun to be around and kind to him, even if he teased her mercilessly.

He just didn’t like feeling like he was being left behind, even if photography was his passion.

“Playing in the girls’ toilets again? Band of perverts,” he said, forcing a grin onto his face.

“We’re not perverts! We’re just... sort of... chilling there?” Minamoto replied defensively. “We’re not doing anything bad!”

“I wonder if the teachers would accept this explanation...”

“There’s no way you’d tell anyone, you’re sometimes hanging out with us there too!” He said, poking Sousuke in the ribs and making him yelp in result.

“Stop! Time out, I almost dropped the bowl!”

He didn’t expect the bowl to be instantly taken away so Minamoto could run his fingers against his sides, forcing an inhuman squeak out of Sousuke’s mouth.

“W-What are you doing?! Let go! Let me go! I’m too cute to be treated like this!” He cried, but he also couldn’t hide the fact that he was laughing. “Let go, pervert! The cake! Check on the cake!”

“Oh, right. The cake,” Minamoto said, almost dropping the struggling Sousuke to the floor but grabbing him on time and making sure he was steady before jumping from the table to go check on it.

“You forgot about it!?”

“It’s still fine, so there’s no problem.”

He didn’t even know how to react to this, he was too tired. With a sigh, he pulled out his phone to check the time and smiled fondly at the homescreen - the selfie he forced Minamoto to pose for earlier, with their detective getups. He’d have to guard it well now, so Minamoto didn’t notice, but it was sort of cute. Of course, Sousuke was the cute part of the picture, obviously.

This really could be fun, if they didn’t get involved in anything serious. But that was something he couldn’t be sure of.

the investigation begins

Chapter Notes

hello again! i bring you chapter 2, in which kou and mitsuba already fail to notice the obvious

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A day earlier Mitsuba seemed to like his new detective hat, but right now he just seemed embarrassed to be wearing it in public.

“Once more people arrive at school, I’m taking this off,” he said firmly, fiddling with something on his camera. Kou was already impressed that he put it on at all, so he didn’t have a problem with that. “Do we even know which clubs were involved in the incidents?”

“I texted Yokoo yesterday! He always knows more about stuff like this,” Kou said. “It were the newspapers club and the literature club!”

“So, both on the first floor, almost next to each other,” Mitsuba muttered, staring at the screen. He seemed worried... probably because he also belonged to a club and it could affect him too. He could try to pretend it didn’t bother him, but Kou could see right through it.

“The newspapers club always have early meetings! According to Yokoo, at least.”

“So you’re not even sure!? Why did I even decide to help a dummy like you?!”

“Shut up, I’m sure enough to give it a try!” He said, grabbing one of Mitsuba’s hands and dragging him along.

“H-Hey, you don’t have to be so forceful, be gentle with me! Or I’m going to scream for help!”

He wasn’t going to, Kou knew as much.

Soon, they arrived in front of the door to the newspapers club room, and Kou didn’t even hesitate before knocking and entering.

“At least wait until they respond, idiot!” Mitsuba cried, but in the end just hid behind Kou the moment they fumbled inside, almost as if he was using him as a shield. *No, not almost. That’s exactly what he’s doing.*

“Uhm... Sorry for intrusion!” Kou said to the surprised club members who were currently staring at them. “W-We wanted to ask some questions!”

"You wanted. You," Mitsuba muttered against his back, quietly enough so only Kou could hear him, that little bastard.

"Oh, you're Minamoto-kun, right? President Minamoto's younger brother," one girl said. "How can we help you?"

"It's us who want to help!" He exclaimed, trying to pull his friend out from behind his back. "Come on, Mitsuba... You were recently targeted by a thief, right? We want to catch them!"

"Speak for yourself, Minamoto-kun," Mitsuba grumbled, clinging to his arm instead. Despite being so cocky, he was also a coward, but if he was being honest, Kou didn't really mind shielding him from the imaginary danger. Whatever made him feel better.

"It's not really that big of a deal, we already reported it to the teachers..."

"I insist!" Kou said firmly. "It's my duty, as... uh... the president's little brother!"

"Well... alright then. What do you want to talk about?" She finally gave up. "Also, cute hat... Mitsuba-kun, was it?"

He could feel Mitsuba glueing himself off of his arm and beginning to look around the room instead.

"Thank you, senpai," he said in a perfectly polite voice, making Kou cringe on the inside a little.

Mitsuba could act nice, of course he could. But Kou didn't really like it when he did. Maybe it was just because he knew Mitsuba so well, but it felt strange and unnatural. It could usually get Mitsuba whatever he wanted... from anyone other than Kou himself.

"Do you mind if I take some photos around here?" He asked with a smile, and Kou could swear the girl blushed a little. He wasn't sure why, but it annoyed him a bit. Probably because he knew it wasn't even Mitsuba's real smile. It wasn't really that cute, Mitsuba could do better than this.

"Of course, feel free!" She replied to him, before turning back to Kou. "So, Minamoto-kun?"

"R-Right!" He reached into his bag and pulled out the notebook from yesterday, where they put together some plans and questions. Well, mostly Mitsuba did, with Kou only adding something once in a while. "When did you first notice something was off?"

"Hmm... When was it?" The girl turned to some other club member.

"Two days ago, senpai," a boy said. "We came here in the morning and realized that someone had been inside... Even though the door was locked."

"Oh, right. And then we realized some things were missing."

"It's nothing that important though, but... we sort of kept those things as memories of what we do here," the boy continued. "Some old issues of our school newspapers and photos... It

would be nice to get them back. Sentimental value, you know.”

Kou could swear Mitsuba almost tripped over something while wandering around the club room, but wasn’t sure if it meant anything. Mitsuba was clumsy after all.

“S-So, whoever did this, they had to do this the previous day after classes, right?!” Kou asked, probably with a little too much enthusiasm, as he was sure that he heard Mitsuba snicker quietly.

“We didn’t meet after school that day, so I suppose…”

Three days ago after school… He was hanging out with Mitsuba around the town that day, so he really couldn’t have a clue about what was happening at school at that time. Maybe he should ask Nene and Amane? They were always somewhere around, as if they didn’t have anything better to do.

Well, to be fair, when Kou wasn’t with Mitsuba, he was with the two of them. Or the four of them were together, so it’s not like he really had any right to judge them.

“Who usually has the key?” Kou continued.

“We just leave it in the staff room… so I suppose anyone could take it, if they were determined enough…” The club president said, but that’s when Mitsuba did something to which he reacted with a high pitched squeal.

“What did you break again?!” Kou called out to him, but immediately rushed to his side.

“Why do you immediately assume it’s my fault?! You bully! Some friend you are!” Mitsuba whined. “It was already broken, I just pulled it a little!”

“So, you just broke it further?!”

“I didn’t!”

“What are you kids doing…?” One club member sighed, approaching them.

“The window is broken, senpai!” Mitsuba exclaimed in a slightly panicked tone, tears in his eyes already. “I thought it looked a little weird so I pulled the handle and then it almost fell out completely! What would happen to me if it did?! I’m too cute to die like this!”

“So you did break it?” Kou asked, giving him a light chop to the head.

“I didn’t! You could believe in me a little more, you jerk!”

“Ah, this…” The club member muttered. “Actually, it was already like this. Mitsuba-kun didn’t break it.”

“See!? You’re always so cruel to me-”

“Shut up for a moment,” Kou said, putting his hand over Mitsuba’s mouth, who even then tried to keep on talking, with poor results. “Wait, so... if it was broken all along... if someone knew about it, they could’ve gotten inside without using the door?”

“Well... I guess... It was supposed to be fixed by now, but apparently they keep forgetting about it.”

“That might be an important clue...”

That’s when Mitsuba licked his hand in order to make him let go.

“W-What the hell?! Gross!”

“That’s what you get for being so rough with the delicate little me!” Mitsuba stuck his tongue out, watching Kou jump away from him. “Also, the note! Wasn’t there supposed to be a note?”

“A note?”

“The one the thief left, dumbass!”

“Oh, right.” Kou really forgot about that, so it was good that Mitsuba remembered. He couldn’t even be that mad about the spit on his hand, so he just wiped it on his uniform. “Did the thief really leave a note?”

“Oh, they did,” the club president. “Here it is, if you want to see.”

The girl picked something up from her desk, then passed it over to Kou. It was a small piece of paper, nothing special, probably cut out from a notebook. One would think something like his would be executed better, but it’s not like Kou had any artistic sense, so maybe it was okay...

“What the heck? This is ugly,” Mitsuba said in turn, staring at the note. “They should’ve at least designed something nice if they’re going to play a phantom thief. Crooked handwriting, paper like from a math notebook and absolutely no theme? Whoever made it, their sense of aesthetic is the worst.”

Here it comes, an artist’s judgement.

“That was merciless...” one of the club members said.

“In this case, he knows what he’s talking about,” Kou commented. “Sometimes he just has to let it out.”

“I don’t like that tone,” Mitsuba muttered, giving him a glare, then raising his camera higher and taking a photo of the note. “Well, in the end it’s not like it matters. They wanted to pass a message, not show off their aesthetic. I still think it’s lame though.”

When he moved away, Kou finally looked down to read the note.

Apologies for stopping by uninvited, but we'd like to stir some trouble. We'll be taking the items you hold dear, but don't worry, they're safe with us.

~ Phantom Thieves of Memories

"This is so..."

"...unspeakably lame," Mitsuba finished his sentence, clearly disgusted. "Now I feel like we have to catch them just to stop this bullshit."

"So now you're finally motivated? Weirdo," Kou muttered, then continued before Mitsuba could react with more whining. "We'll definitely catch them though! Definitely!"

"Even if you say this..." He gave him a puzzled look, then sighed. "You talk so big... You better keep your words now."

"I will! With your help, I will!"

"Anyway!" Mitsuba looked away, and Kou was almost sure he was blushing again. What was up with him lately...? "If we need anything else, we'll stop by again, senpai. We should be going now, there isn't much time before classes start."

"Huh? We're only just-"

"No protesting, stupid earring boy!" He commended, already walking towards the exit. "I've embarrassed myself enough already..."

"Hey, Minamoto-kun... is he... always like this?" The club president asked quietly, as if she didn't want Mitsuba to hear her.

"Huh? Like what?"

"You know... He seems like a handful," she replied with an apologetic smile. "I hope he's not giving you a hard time."

Mitsuba? Being a handful? Giving him a hard time? Kou blinked once, twice, like a confused cat. He couldn't really say either of these were true. Maybe he was just so used to him at this point, and maybe bantering with Mitsuba became an irreplaceable part of his life, but being with him seemed so easy...

"Don't worry about this, senpai," he replied with a grin. "Mitsuba is just... Mitsuba."

And maybe it wasn't good enough of an answer, because she seemed puzzled, but Kou simply ran out of the room, chasing after Mitsuba and squeezing the notebook he was still holding.

They spent most of their lunch break discussing what they should do next. Yokoo and Satou at first were listening to them, but soon gave up and just let them do their thing... but in the end, they really didn't have many clues yet. They decided to pay a visit to the other club first, but not today, since Sousuke had to attend his own club activities. Minamoto in turn said he'd ask Radish-senpai and Pervert-senpai if they knew anything... since they were always at school anyway.

Sousuke liked his club. He wasn't really close with anyone there, since he was putting up a facade for everyone who wasn't Minamoto and people in their immediate surroundings, but... it was alright like that. They still acknowledged his talent, so they weren't all bad. Well, they'd have to be blind and stupid to ignore how skilled he was, but thankfully they weren't, so Sousuke could put up with them, even if it meant pretending.

Pretending was still better than getting bullied for petty reasons, like him telling an inappropriate joke too loud, or acting too cocky, or just because of his looks.

In conclusion, club activities weren't so bad. Usually, at least. This time he really just wished he could run back to Minamoto and continue their stupid game. He wasn't exactly pleased with how quickly he became invested in this plan, but at this point he couldn't do anything but go along with it. Minamoto was really set on getting this done, and Sousuke could be a good friend too, when he tried.

"Mitsuba-kun?"

"H-Huh?"

He didn't even notice when their club supervisor approached him, too busy with his camera and looking at the photos he took in the newspapers club room, trying to find some clue.

"Your mind seems to be somewhere else today," the teacher said, pointing at his camera. "Something important?"

For a moment Sousuke stayed silent, staring at the photo of Minamoto asking that newspapers club senpai something with a serious face. He looked dumb.

"Mhm," he muttered anyway. "A friend dragged me into some... project. I'm taking photos for it."

"And that's why you're so distracted today?"

"It's important-" He almost raised his voice, the pitch already dangerously straying from the tone he usually spoke in. "I'm sorry, I'll leave this for later."

"No need to, Mitsuba-kun," the teacher laughed. "It's still photography related, right?"

"Well... in a way..." Sousuke muttered.

“You’re far above most your clubmates when it comes to skills. If you want to focus on your project for a while instead of coming here, I’ll understand.”

“Really?!” This time he couldn’t stop himself. It just jumped out.

“Really. You might want to snap some pictures to share with us later, though. Other than this, I have no reason to keep you here.”

“I’ll take some, I promise!” Sousuke exclaimed, already grabbing his bag and heading towards the door with the enthusiasm he wouldn’t expect himself of.

He wasn’t exactly sure what was with him lately. A while ago there was no way he’d have skipped club for something this stupid, and yet here he was, more jumping than running. He didn’t even have to wonder in which direction he should go, knowing it was most likely the girls’ bathroom on the third floor.

Minamoto was probably going to be surprised. Sousuke was already trying to come up with ways of mocking the expression he was going to have, as he ran there, grinning to himself.

Kou used to spend more time in the girls’ bathroom at one point. He’d been friends with Yashiro and Amane for a pretty long time now, ever since he attached himself to the cute senpai and her weird friend by accident, about a year ago. Now that he thought about it, it was pretty embarrassing... but he gained some good friends, so he couldn’t really be mad at his past self.

Then, Mitsuba appeared.

Well, appeared wasn’t really a good word for it. Mitsuba was sort of always there, but at first Kou paid him no mind. He couldn’t really be blamed for that though, the Mitsuba he first met was... boring. Nice, but boring, and looked like was forcing himself way too hard. It didn’t seem right, especially now. Mitsuba should be annoying, loud, whiny and also carefree, because that’s what suited him the most.

And so, he stopped spending so much time in the girls’ bathroom. He was still going there pretty often, but it was no longer ‘everyday’, like Nene and Amane continued to do so.

Still, it was a natural guess to look for them there, and yet they were nowhere to be found.

“Hmm,” Kou muttered to himself, looking around the bathroom. He even checked every stall, even though they obviously weren’t there. “Well, this is weird.”

Finally leaving, he tried to think of any other place they could be at. The rooftop, the library (if they wished to piss off professor Tsuchigomori), the nurse’s office, maybe, if Amane did something stupid again...

“Huh? I thought you were going to be with your gang of perverts,” a voice greeted him, once he made about ten steps after leaving the bathroom. “What, did they finally learn how gross and suspicious it is?”

“Wha- There’s nothing gross or suspicious about it!” He reacted instinctively, before even seeing Mitsuba. “And what about you, you never skip club! Why are you here?”

“What, are you telling me to go back!?” Mitsuba whined, putting one hand over his heart in a dramatic gesture. “Even though I came here for you... I thought we were friends!”

“Shut up, there’s no way you’d skip just like this!” Kou poked his cheek once he was in his reach.

“Ouch, do you ever clip your nails?! You’re going to damage my pretty face, stop it, stop!” He cried. “Fine! I didn’t skip, I was allowed to play your stupid detective game as a substitute because I’m too good for that club anyway! Happy now?!”

“Oh,” Kou muttered, then grinned. “It makes things easier, so yeah, I suppose I am!”

“O-Of course you are!” Mitsuba replied, but the way he stuttered was somewhat suspicious. “Anyway, how did the search for Radish-senpai and the other toilet dwelling pervert go?”

“Don’t call her that!”

“Not even a comment on what I call the other guy... Well, I’m assuming you didn’t find them?”

“I’m... I’m working on that?”

“Working on what?” A new voice joined the conversation. “Ah, it’s just you two. What are you up to?”

“Come on, Amane-kun, you shouldn’t interrupt them!”

“Senpai!”

“Crazy knife!”

“Are you still so hung up on the knife incident?! It was one time!” Amane exclaimed defensively, pointing his finger at Mitsuba. It was something they never spoke about, but Mitsuba apparently had taken a liking to that dumb nickname and there was no way to stop him from using it.

“I sure hope it was one time...” Mitsuba muttered, shifting closer to Kou. “Minamoto-kun, now’s our chance.”

“Oh, right” He said, turning to Nene and Amane, who also stood weirdly close to each other... but maybe it was just normal? Amane was always pretty clingy with her, and though at first Kou didn’t like that, he didn’t really care anymore. Point was, they looked like they were up to something. “I know you’re mostly just in the bathroom, but have you noticed anything weird lately?”

“Weirder than the fact that you’re wearing some stupid cosplay hat right now?” Amane asked.

“Don’t call it stupid!”

“Can you go even a moment without arguing?” Nene said with a pout. “And sorry, Kou-kun, but you’d have to be more specific... Around him nothing ever seems normal.”

Mitsuba snorted quietly into his sleeve at that, before raising his voice to the ear-piercing tone again.

“Radish-senpai has a point, with him I wouldn’t even be surprised if he was the thief!”

“T-The thief? Don’t be s-silly, Mitsuba-kun!” She replied.

“Wait, Yashiro, what thief?” Amane asked. “Do you know something I don’t?”

“Uhm... I... It’s Aoi-chan! I know about it from her!” The girl said firmly. Almost too firmly. “She talked about it during lunch, there’s a rumour about a phantom thief going around!”

“Oh, so you did know about this,” Mitsuba pointed out with a smirk. “Anything else that Aoi-chan-senpai told you?”

“N-No... Maybe you should talk to h-her yourself? Tomorrow, that is!” Nene replied.

Kou just gave her a puzzled look before reaching for his notebook and noting down, ‘*talk to Akane Aoi-senpai tomorrow*’. Maybe it wasn’t such a bad idea, that girl always seemed to know a lot about everything that was happening around.

“This aside... I was looking for you,” he said. “Did something happen?”

“Huh? Is there some rule forbidding us from leaving the bathroom?” Amane asked with an innocent face. “We were just looking for Tsukasa!”

“Tsukasa-kun?” Mitsuba muttered, moving even closer to Kou, probably without even realizing it.

“Yeah, Tsukasa. He’s been acting weird lately, disappearing once classes are over... Not that I really mind that, but you know how he is, better not let him run too wild or I’ll face consequences too, as his brother...” Amane continued with a sigh. “Can’t find him anywhere though.”

Mitsuba’s hand made its way to grab at the back of Kou’s shirt, but Kou decided not to say anything. He tended to do that, sometimes. Kou knew Mitsuba was scared of Tsukasa, and even if he didn’t know any details, he knew his friend most likely had his reasons. Besides, it’s not like he didn’t know that the younger Yugi brother sometimes acted like he was completely nuts. No chance he was going to let him anywhere near Mitsuba anyway.

“Wait, you were talking about some thief!” Amane said. “What if it’s Tsukasa?”

“No way, no way,” Yashiro replied, waving her hand. “Nanamine-senpai would stop him. A- At least I hope so...”

“Hmm... You’re right, I suppose. Ever since he started hanging out with those two, things calmed down a little. He even stopped breaking my stuff so much.”

“That’s because he has someone else to bother now... Well, that’s good in a way, I suppose...” she said, sighing heavily. Even Kou felt sort of bad for Amane. Teru could be difficult sometimes, but living with Tsukasa sounded like a nightmare.

“Still, I can’t just leave him be. Let’s go, Yashiro!”

“H-Huh? Already? What about Kou-kun and Mitsuba-kun’s investigation?” She asked, as Amane already pulled her by the hand to go in the opposite direction of where they came from.

“They’ll do just fine on their own, come on!”

“Stop pulling me, I can walk on my own!”

And so, the two of them left, leaving Kou alone with Mitsuba again.

“We... really didn’t learn anything new. What a disappointment,” his friend said.

“Well, aside from the Tsukasa thing.”

“If it’s Tsukasa-kun, I’m not helping you anymore.”

“Don’t worry about that! If that bastard tries anything, I’ll protect you,” Kou said, placing one hand on Mitsuba’s shoulder and giving him a thumb up, but only receiving a blank stare in response. “What?”

“As if you stood any chance against him, stupid lame-ass traffic-safety earring boy,” Mitsuba replied. “Don’t try anything.”

“Have some faith in me!”

“Absolutely no. So, are we going to check out that other club or no? What was it again?”

“Uhm,” Kou muttered, checking his notes again. “The literature club. I guess we should go, since you’re already here and all.”

He hesitated for a moment before speaking up again, a little embarrassed.

“Want me to walk you home once we’re done?”

“Huh?” Mitsuba’s eyes widened a little before his expression turned into the gremlin-like grin again. “You’re so hung up on this idea, aren’t you? Has my cuteness finally messed with your head? Sorry, but I’m not interested in people with lame earrings-”

“Fine, I didn’t ask!” Kou said, rolling his eyes, but... he was sort of disappointed. He wasn’t sure why though. Turning around, he was prepared to start walking back towards the school section with club rooms, but suddenly Mitsuba grabbed his wrist.

“Wait,” he mumbled through the sleeve he covered his mouth with. “I-If you insist, I guess I’ll let you do it this time.”

Oh. *Oh*.

Kou wasn’t exactly sure what “oh” meant, but that’s all his mind could produce at the moment. Oh.

“Uhm. Sure. Once we’re done, then,” he said, and Mitsuba just nodded.

Well, this was embarrassing, but... it did make him happy.

Even if he wasn’t sure why.

“You’re a terrible actress, Yashiro.”

“You didn’t tell me this was supposed to include acting, Amane-kun!” The girl pouted as they found themselves on the rooftop again. For some reason, it became their temporary hideout, as the bathroom would’ve been too obvious.

“I thought that fooling the kids was at least obvious?” He replied, tilting his head like a cat. “It’s not gonna work if you keep acting like that though!”

“But I don’t want to lie to them!” Nene said, being almost on the verge of tears. “Besides, did you really have to mention Tsukasa-kun to Mitsuba-kun? He looked ready to cry!”

“Like you right now?” Amane teased with a grin. “Don’t worry, it’s not like Tsukasa is actually behind any of this. A hair is not going to fall off Pinkie’s head.”

“Thank god, Kou-kun would be so mad. I don’t know at whom, but he would be,” she let out a relieved sigh. “I really don’t know why I agreed to this, I’m already regretting everything...”

“Come on, Yashiro, you agreed because all my plans are brilliant! And you also love me.”

“Sometimes I wonder why.”

“That’s cruel!”

“I wouldn’t say it if you didn’t deserve it! We’re going to be in so much trouble when they find out it’s us!”

“Relax, Yashiro, these two wouldn’t sell us out. And we’ll just return all of this once we’re done!” Amane said cheerfully. Kneeling down on the floor, he felt around the tiles for a moment, then removed a loose one, revealing a hole underneath it. “Look, everything’s safe right here.”

“How did you even find a place like this...?” Nene asked with a frown.

“That’s a secret,” he replied, putting a finger over his lips. “Now, time for our next heist, and this one will serve as a misdirection. It’ll require you to step up your acting game though, Yashiro.”

“H-Huh?” She gave him a puzzled look, only to receive a smirk.

“Don’t worry, it’ll all make sense soon enough.”

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!!

searching for clues

Chapter Notes

hello! i'm back with another chapter, in which there's a glimpse of kou and mitsuba's backstory in this au. also, nene is struggling. someone save her

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sousuke and Minamoto had a weird relationship.

Or, maybe rather, it started off weird, because Minamoto sort of... saved his life. They didn't talk about it anymore, but it's not something Sousuke was ever going to forget, and it was probably the reason why Minamoto could be a little overprotective sometimes.

It's not like it bothered him much. In the past, there was never anyone who'd defend him when he needed it, after all.

When they first met, they were first years, barely just starting to attend middle school. Sousuke was sitting right in front of Minamoto, because of the alphabetical order, and he hoped that maybe (just maybe) they could become friends.

But it didn't happen, and Sousuke now thought that he could only blame himself. Back then though, he couldn't have done anything differently. He was so scared and tired of being an outcast that he turned himself into a boring background character who spent the whole first year trying to make friends and failing. And then, during the second year, he got sorted into a class where he knew nobody, and it started all over again.

Until... *that* incident, during winter of the second year.

That incident being Sousuke barely avoiding getting hit by a car, only because Minamoto happened to be nearby and reacted faster than him, pushing him out of the way so hard that they both ended up on the ground.

The car still crashed, and it was determined to be the driver's fault. And if Minamoto hadn't been there, Sousuke would've died, most likely. Still, it was a pretty big shock. It made him break his character, freak out right in front of Minamoto, and then run away, leaving him alone to deal with whatever the police was going to ask him. He didn't notice he dropped his camera somewhere in that mess, which made him even more stressed, as he definitely didn't want to tell his mom he lost something so expensive... He also didn't want to tell her he almost died that day, and he had no friends he could cry to, so it just ended up being the most stressful night of his life, and next day he still had to go to school. Someone as delicate as him needed a break, really.

“You. Wait. Your name is Mitsuba, right? The camera was signed, so I asked around how to find you. I wanted to give it back,” a familiar voice greeted Sousuke the next day, when he left the classroom after lessons were over. “You dropped it yesterday.”

He honestly wanted to just go home, and maybe get some sleep this time, but here he was, with Minamoto standing in front of him, holding his precious camera in his hands. Without even thinking, Sousuke snatched it away from him and turned around, hugging it to his chest. Thank god. At least one problem less.

“Woah, that must’ve been really important to you, I see...” Minamoto said, and when Sousuke turned to look at him, he looked a little lost. “Are you okay? You kinda scared me yesterday, just started crying and running away...”

Was he even serious? He didn’t sleep all night because of how badly that scared him, and he felt like he could explode any moment now because he couldn’t even tell anyone about it, and this idiot was asking him if he was okay?

Actually, screw it.

“...have you lost your mind? Of course I’m not okay!” He snapped, and Minamoto seemed completely taken aback. “How could I be?! Just shut up and think before you speak! Or is that too much to you?! Stupid! Blockhead! Bet you now want to take advantage of the poor little me because I’m supposed to be grateful to you?! Just leave me alone! Go to hell!”

Soon, he was out of breath. It was the longest moment of not holding back he had in over a year, and he couldn’t even care right now. He was always the last one to leave the classroom anyway, so nobody heard him aside from this dumbass. He could go back to pretending tomorrow.

For a moment, the silence seemed deafening.

“Uhm... You really went off here, ahaha...” Minamoto finally muttered.

“That’s all you have to say!? I always knew Minamoto-kun was a dummy, but this is just...”

“Huh? You know my name?” He asked with a surprised look on his face.

“You-”

Oh.

Right. Earlier he said it, he only knew Sousuke’s name was Mitsuba because the camera was signed. He...

He didn’t even remember him. Even though Sousuke spent so much time trying to start a conversation, or trying to stay close to his group to at least have some semblance of friends... It really didn’t matter.

“Hey, what’s wrong? You look like you’re about to cry again. You didn’t get hurt yesterday or anything, right?” Minamoto asked, sounding awfully concerned. “Should we go to the

nurse's of- "

"For someone who can't even remember me, you sure seem worried," he muttered, taking a step back. He should just run. He was good at running away.

"Of course I'm worried, that was dangerous!" Minamoto exclaimed. "Wait... remember you?"

"How many people named Mitsuba do you know?! How many?!"

"Well, until you said this I thought that with you it would be two... Wait, you're that Mitsuba?!"

"Oh, so you do remember! Is this really how you treat someone who was sitting in front of you for a year?!"

"I do remember, but..." Minamoto seemed confused once again. "You seem completely different now. Also, is this how you treat someone who saved your life? A second later and you would've been dead, y'know. That'd make you even harder to remember."

That was it. That was the thing that finally made it impossible to hold back tears, as they rolled down his cheeks. He quickly tried to wipe them away but an annoyingly loud sob escaped him too, so this was a lost cause. So, time to run.

Or so he thought, but he tripped over his own legs and ended up on the floor. This was the worst.

"H-Hey, you really have to be more careful!" Minamoto said, kneeling down next to him. "Uhm... You... Yeah, I already know you're not okay, yeah..."

"T-That shit was so scary!" Sousuke sobbed out. "I'm too young and too cute for near death experiences, and if I actually died, nobody would even miss me!"

"Don't say things like that..."

"But that's the truth!" He replied, on his knees trying to get away from Minamoto but only getting as far as the wall, to at least sit there and hug his legs to his chest. And of course Minamoto followed, sitting down next to him. "I have no friends, I'm forgettable, people in the club only remember me when they need help with some project... I don't even have anyone I could tell about this!"

There was another moment of silence, interrupted only by his muffled sobs. He was trying to calm down, he really was, but...

"Well, I wouldn't call you forgettable at least. Not when you act like this," Minamoto muttered. "Is this how you really are?"

"Even if I am, what about it?! I can't just... They'll just hate me again... It'll be just like in elementary school..."

“Mitsuba....” He gave him another sad look, before moving closer to him so their shoulders touched. “Y’know, I don’t think you have to fake it. You seem like a weirdo... but I don’t think I hate you.”

“Thanks, it really makes me feel better now,” Sousuke replied, sarcasm clear in his voice.

“And, right now, you have me. You’ve already yelled at me, so if you also wanna cry, go ahead. I won’t tell anyone.”

“Huh?” He just stared at Minamoto with wide eyes, not sure how to react.

“Like, just get it out! You’ll probably feel better if you do. My younger sister sometimes sleeps better after she’s all cried out. It’s alright! I’ll just sit here with you.”

Sousuke was so surprised that he stopped crying for a moment.

And then, he just started crying even harder than before. He cried and cried, until he tired himself out... Maybe he was just so moved by this one kind gesture that it was making it hard to just stop. And Minamoto, just like he said, sat there, waiting for him to calm down.

Somehow, this meant a lot.

It was also the first time he didn’t go home alone.

The next day after that, Minamoto invited himself into his classroom during the lunch break, bringing homemade cookies, apparently to cheer him up. Then, realizing Sousuke was still acting as if his outburst from the day before never happened, he poked at his forehead until he finally dropped the act and snapped at him again, and finally said: *“Thank god. I didn’t imagine that.”*

And to Sousuke’s surprise, this time... they actually became friend. This was probably the weirdest thing out of them all, if he was being serious, but Minamoto began to visit his classroom during lunch breaks, and then dragging him around after school was over, going as far as bringing him to the weird toilet gatherings. Once their second year was over, they got sorted into the same class once again, along with Yokoo and Satou, who also accepted him this time... It all seemed too good to be true.

He was also pretty sure Minamoto got that stupid lame traffic safety omamori earring just to mock him. That had to be it.

“Hey, Mitsuba, are you even listening to me? I’ve been talking to you for the past-”

“I wasn’t listening,” Sousuke replied instantly, glancing at him.

“That’s harsh!”

“More often than not it’s you who’s not listening to me, lame earring.”

He didn't know why he was suddenly thinking about all of that. Maybe it was because Minamoto was walking him home again, just like on that day. Sousuke wasn't sure if he did it consciously, but he was always the one to walk on the side of the sidewalk closer to the street, as if shielding him from it. Sousuke never asked, because if it really wasn't on purpose he'd only embarrass himself. Like, he was cute, and talented, of course he should be considered this important! But...

He still wasn't sure if he was.

"Mitsubaaa, can you at least pretend you're listening?"

"Why? That would be lying."

"Then pay attention!" Minamoto said, bumping into his side with enough force that Sousuke swayed a little.

"Stop being so rough with me, I'm delicate!" He replied, responding in the same way but it barely did anything to Minamoto. Of course. He overestimated his strength again.

"Okay, now that I finally have your attention, show me the photo of the second note," Minamoto ignored his whining. "You took one, right?"

His beloved camera was still dangling from his neck, as he refused to even put it in the bag, so, with a pout, he took it into his hands again. He actually took a lot of photos, both in the newspapers club and the literature club rooms, because he didn't exactly know what to look for, and since he already agreed to do this, he wasn't going to half-ass it... so he just photographed whatever. Maybe it was going to be useful later. Minamoto better appreciate it.

"Here you go," Sousuke muttered, moving the camera closer to him. "Why do you want to see it?"

"Our second target is not so different from the first one, we'll be taking those precious memories of yours. Do not think of us as working with ill intentions, all will become clear in due time," Minamoto read out loud. "Do you think there will be more victims?"

"Who knows? Probably." He shrugged, staring at the photo too. "All will become clear in due time... What the hell does that even mean? They're not making any sense."

"They're... Oh, right!" Suddenly, Minamoto said it loudly enough to make Sousuke jump a little.

"What are you screaming for, dumbass!? We're in the middle of a street!"

"You're screaming too, so shut up and listen. In both of these notes, the thieves refer to themselves as 'we'!"

"No shit, Minamoto-kun."

"Don't you get it?! There's more than one of them! It can't be that Tsukasa bastard, even Nene-senpai said Nanamine-senpai wouldn't play along with something this dumb."

“And then she added that she ‘hopes so’, Radish-senpai is not the most reliable. Tsukasa-kun could also trick Simp-senpai into helping him out. You can never be too sure,” he grumbled. He wanted to believe it wasn’t Tsukasa, but Amane’s words still kicked his anxiety off.

“Don’t call her Radish-senpai!” Minamoto predictably said. “And I still don’t think it’s him. Amane said he’s calmed down because of the other two. There’s no reason for them to help him!”

“Fine! Let’s work with the assumption it’s not Tsukasa-kun!” Sousuke threw his hands in the air, signaling that he was giving up. “We don’t have any other leads though.”

“Uuuuh,” he let out a very undignified sound before giving up too. “I’ll think about this at home and definitely come up with something!”

“Definitely, my ass,” Sousuke muttered. “We all know I’m the brains of this operation.”

“Well, it’s true that you’re doing most of the thinking. Thank you, Mitsuba,” he said, leaning a little closer to him with a smile. A smile that made Sousuke feel... things, so he put a hand on Minamoto’s forehead and pushed him away, already feeling his face heat up. Then, he stopped in the middle of the sidewalk.

“Personal space, you pervert! And of course, at least one of us has to keep it together. A- Anyway, look, we’re here. You can go home now, bodyguard.”

“I wasn’t really guarding you from anything?”

“Does it matter? You still came with me all the way here,” Sousuke laughed nervously, looking anywhere but at Minamoto. This wasn’t good. Lately he was getting worse at hiding how he felt about him.

Minamoto just gave him a weird look, as if he couldn’t figure him out. *Thank god he’s not the smartest*, he thought. He was about to say bye and just run off towards his home...

...when Minamoto simply leaned forward, giving him a quick hug and then letting go before Sousuke could even register what happened.

“See you tomorrow, Mitsuba. I’ll be waiting for you, like always,” he said with a grin, turning around and running off, leaving the frozen Sousuke alone without any sort of explanation.

For a moment, he just stood there, watching Minamoto until he disappeared from his sight. The spring weather was still just right for him to wear his favorite sweater without overheating, but suddenly he felt too hot, as if his friend’s touch burned, but in a pleasant way. He couldn’t even explain it, so he just hid his burning face in his hands, trying to calm down.

“At least do it properly next time, idiot.”

"I can't do this. I can't do this anymore," Mitsuba whined the next day as Kou dragged him out of their classroom during the lunch break. "How did this even happen?!"

"You're so dramatic, didn't we expect another incident to happen?" Kou replied, glancing back at him over his shoulder. He was complaining like always, but somehow he seemed to be squeezing Kou's hand harder than the other way around. "Maybe this time they've left some clue, come on!"

"The club gathers after classes anyway! There's no one there right now, stupid Minamoto-kun!"

"I'm not even going there!"

Kou stopped and turned around to face his friend, who was currently being insufferable again, only to be faced with one pink eye and an unreadable expression. What was up with him today...?

"Are you still worried Tsukasa is behind this?"

"I-If I am, what then?"

"I already told you, I'll beat him up if it's needed!"

"It's not! Getting in his way can only end badly for y... for us!" Mitsuba exclaimed, squeezing his hand even more tightly. He seemed awfully stressed, and for some reason Kou had a hunch it wasn't only about Tsukasa.

"Mitsuba... are you hiding something from me?" Kou asked, a little worried. "Do you have any problems with something? You know you can always talk to m-"

"My only problem right now is you being a reckless idiot!"

Sometimes Kou really didn't know what was his deal. He was way too complicated and too bad at actually showing what's on his mind, Kou already knew it. Mitsuba wasn't good at expressing himself.

"Are you... worried about me?" He asked another question, trying to make a guess.

"W-What?! Of course not! I'm just-"

Kou only sighed and reached out to pat his head. It was one way to make him stop being so overly dramatic, he was easily calmed down when treated correctly. He had it figured out, to a certain extent.

"We're only going to talk to Akane-senpai now. Remember what Nene-senpai told us yesterday? She's the expert when it comes to rumors!" He said, smiling at him. "If there's anything we missed, she probably knows it! So don't worry about the other club for now. Let's leave it for later."

“You’re going to drag me there anyway... against my will... because I’m weak and it’s easy to force yourself onto me...” Mitsuba muttered, but it lacked any power.

“That’s what you always say,” Kou sighed yet again. *So high maintenance*. “Anyway! Break time’s over!”

“Huh?” He only let out a surprised sound before Kou returned to pulling him towards the high school section of the building. “So I was right! You enjoy forcing yourself onto me!”

“Shut up there and move your legs or I’ll carry you there!”

“Just try it!” Mitsuba snarked, but somehow that threat seemed to work, as instead of resisting he finally started to follow him. Maybe the idea of being carried scared him off... It definitely seemed embarrassing, Kou wouldn’t want it to happen to him, but since Mitsuba was a weakling he had nothing to worry about.

He didn’t even whine that much on their way towards the right classroom, Kou considered that an achievement. It also seemed like luck was on their side, as the girl they were looking for was just leaving the room, too.

“Akane-senpai!” He called out to her, pulling Mitsuba along.

“Ah, Minamoto-kun!” She said, smiling at him. “And Mitsuba-kun. Are you looking for Nene-chan and Amane-kun? Because they aren’t here. They disappeared somewhere the moment the lunch break started. Maybe it’s because Nene-chan is worried about the new incident...”

“It’s Radish-senpai’s club this time, right...?” Mitsuba asked, and this time Kou was almost sure he sounded worried. “You’re in it too...”

“Mhm,” the girl hummed in response. “Nene-chan seemed more nervous though... We don’t know what was stolen yet, so she probably went to check.”

“I see... Wait, we’re actually here to talk to you, senpai!” Kou exclaimed. “You’re good with rumours, right?”

“Is this what Nene-chan told you?” She laughed awkwardly. “I suppose I do hear a lot of stuff, so you could say so. Ah, are you two trying to solve this case? Is this why you’re asking?”

“Yes, exactly! Any info could be good!”

“Tone it down, Minamoto-kun, not everyone has to know about it...” Mitsuba muttered, sort of hiding behind his back again. “About Tsukasa-kun...”

“Hmm? Ah, you mean Yugi Tsukasa, Amane-kun’s brother?” Akane-senpai asked. “What about him?”

“You haven’t heard anything about him... y’know, planning something?” He mumbled.

“No, I haven’t. I actually haven’t seen him around much lately, so I asked Nanamine-senpai. She said his grades have been pretty bad lately so he has to take supplementary classes after school. It’s keeping him busy nowadays.”

Huh?

“Does Amane not know about it?” Kou asked, and the girl tilted her head and put a finger to her lips, as if trying to recall anything that would help her form a response.

“I’m not actually sure? We’re in different classes, and Amane-kun is almost at the top of ours, so there’s a chance Tsukasa-kun didn’t want to tell him he messed up,” she said. “They have... a complicated relationship.”

“Duh, who doesn’t have a complicated relationship with that devil,” Mitsuba said quietly, but it was obvious that he breathed out in relief.

So, Tsukasa is out of the list for good. Kou couldn’t say he wasn’t a little relieved too. Less chances the bastard would try to mess with Mitsuba. Maybe he should tell Amane and Nene about this though? They seemed worried the day before...

“I see. Well, then we don’t have any suspects anymore!” He laughed, even though it was kind of inconvenient. “Do you have anything else that could help us?”

“Let’s see... Rumours about the thieves are already spreading all around the school, so it’s hard to determine what’s true.” She gave them an apologetic smile. “But since they call themselves the ‘Phantom Thieves of Memories’, people are saying that... they steal the physical proof of those memories, to make everyone around aware of what’s truly important.”

“Wha-? That’s bullshit,” Mitsuba said. He seemed annoyed. “Photos and old works made in the club, notebooks with old stories written by the literature club... Is this a joke to them?”

“It does seem like a rather mean prank,” their senpai replied. “I’m sorry, I don’t really know anything else.”

“It’s alright, thank you anyway!” Kou bowed to her slightly. “Anything could be useful... Well, at least I hope so!”

“If I learn anything more, I’ll let you know through Nene-chan,” she added. “And good luck.”

“We’ll probably need it...” Mitsuba mumbled, but Kou was already somewhere else. “Eh? Minamoto-kun?! Wait, don’t leave me here alone!”

“Stop being so slow, then!”

“You’re the worst! Literally the worst!”

Aoi just watched the two boys run off in an unspecified direction, smiling to herself.

“Good luck to you too, Nene-chan, Amane-kun.”

Sousuke was already getting sort of tired of the constant running around. Even if usually he only called himself weak and delicate for jokes, he really *was* weak, and telling him to just hurry wasn't going to change that. And there's no way he was going to take up on Minamoto's offer to carry him. Not only his pride would suffer, but also he couldn't handle the thought of having him so close. It wasn't particularly unwanted but... Yeah. No way he was letting him know that. Nope.

“You think Radish-senpai is alright?” He asked absentmindedly, playing with his camera while they were making their way towards the school garden.

“Worried about her?” Minamoto asked with a laugh. “You're going soft, Mitsuba.”

“I am not worried!” Sousuke protested, but his face probably turned bright red, to make it obvious it wasn't the truth. “Why would I be worried about the radish girl? W-We're not even friends!”

“She's not a radish! And I bet she'd say something else if we asked,” he replied.

“To Radish-senpai almost everyone is a friend...”

He didn't mean to make it sound like he was bitter about this or anything. Radish-senpai was nice, so it wasn't surprising she was making friends with ease, unlike Sousuke, who was only fake-nice, too cocky and all that other stuff. To her, he was probably just one of the background friends she didn't care much about.

“Y'know...” Minamoto started. “There's no need to feel self-conscious over this.”

“Hah?”

“Nene-senpai likes you, even if you're a menace, you shouldn't doubt her. So it's fine if you're worried about her, she would be about you, too,” he said, as if reading his thoughts. “You really are weird when it comes to these things...”

“A-Anyway, look, we're here, Minamoto-kun! The school garden!” Sousuke changed the topic, running a little ahead, and raising his camera already. “Let's get this done so I can go home already!”

Even if he went ahead, he waited for his friend to catch up to him, so he didn't have to enter the garden alone. Maybe it wasn't fair, but speaking was supposed to be Minamoto's thing. Sousuke could easily get his way if he just acted a certain way, but...

Ever since he befriended this guy, keeping up that facade became so tiring.

“Ah, Kou-kun, Mitsuba-kun, you really came!” Radish-senpai called out to them the moment she noticed the uninvited guests. “Aoi-chan sad you’ll most likely come...”

“After they paid me a visit during the lunch break, I couldn’t imagine them not coming,” the other girl said. “You came here to ask Nene-chan some questions, right? I’ll leave you alone then. I doubt I’ll be of any use here.”

“Aoi-chan!?”

“Don’t worry, Nene-chan. I’m sure these two will solve this case in no time!” She added with a smile, then left while waving at Radish-senpai, who suddenly seemed way more nervous than just a moment ago.

Suspicious.

“Uhm, so... y-yeah, whatever questions you have, I’ll answer them!” The girl finally said, straightening her back. “Though I probably don’t know that much either...since we had no club yesterday...”

“So much for some actual help. Radish-senpai is being unreliable like always,” Sousuke muttered, covering his mouth with his sleeve but still clearly getting heard, as Minamoto’s closed fist soon met with the top of his head. “Ouch!”

“Don’t listen to him, senpai. Uh... first thing, what was it... When did you realize something was wrong?”

“It wasn’t me, actually... One of the senpais visited in the morning, and noticed the door to the shed was open,” she replied. “No club member would leave it wide open...”

“Was the door not locked?” Minamoto asked with a confused look on his face.

Radish-senpai looked even more confused, as if she didn’t expect this question.

“W-We often don’t lock it? Since we come here a lot outside of club activities too... And no one else really comes here... We didn’t think there would be anything valuable enough for a thief...” She muttered. “C-Come with me, I’ll show you!”

The two of them could only exchange glances and follow her. Sousuke took this as an opportunity to snap some photos of the garden too - it was a nice place and the club members definitely took good care of it. Maybe he could even present some of them to his club’s supervisor once this was all over... He still had to hand something over for the permission to miss meetings after all.

“Here! When that senpai came here in the morning, the door was open like this!” Radish-senpai exclaimed, opening the door to the shed wide. “She got worried, so she went inside to check if anyone’s there, but it was empty... and she found that weird note on the shelf!”

“They left a note again!” Minamoto said, hurrying inside after her. So, Sousuke followed yet again.

“They did!” Radish-senpai replied, suddenly showing much more enthusiasm. She ran up to the bookstand they had in the corner of the room, and picked up a piece of paper. They already knew what to expect. “We are not working with ill will, as our goal is noble. You hoard empty objects that help you remember your important moments, but we’ll make you realize what’s the most important. The Phantom Thieves of Memories.”

“That’s exactly what Akane-senpai said! That these are the rumours about them!”

“M-Maybe the thieves heard them, and went along with it?”

Sousuke sort of stopped listening. Something about this was really making him angry. Empty objects? If they’re precious to someone, what’s wrong with keeping them? What exactly was more important than cherishing the important memories? He loved taking photos of anything important to him. He had so many photos of him and Minamoto together, or Minamoto alone, or Yokoo and Satou, or hell, even Radish-senpai and that other pervert! What was wrong about that? He was going to hoard whatever he wanted, whether some stupid thieves liked it or not.

“Hey, Radish-senpai, what did they steal this time?” He interrupted the duo talking about something excitedly.

“O-Oh, they... took some of the notebooks with the records we made,” she replied, getting visibly gloomier. “I really hope we can get them back soon, we put a lot of effort into them... Well, not only us, too, since you helped us with the photos at some point, remember? It’s a real shame they took these ones, your photos are always so nice, Mitsuba-kun...”

He probably looked like someone hit him on the head with something heavy, as the girl’s eyes widened and she quickly took one of his hands.

“We’ll definitely find them, Mitsuba-kun! Everyone was pretty bummed out that they were stolen, too... it’s going to be fine!”

“I-I didn’t even say anything...” He muttered, trying to act normal, but...

Well... it did hurt a little. He felt almost as if something was stolen from *him*, even though he didn’t even belong to this club.

“I guess now we have even more reasons to catch them, right, Mitsuba?” Minamoto asked, elbowing him gently. “Or are you scared now?”

“You wish! I might be weak and delicate, and the cutest person in this school, but I’m not a coward!”

It was a lie. Sousuke was a big coward. But he’d do it. He could be serious too, when he wanted to.

“There you have it, senpai. We’ll get your records back, even Mitsuba says so!” His friend said with a grin. “Hmm... Is there anything else you think we should know?”

“U-Uh? I don’t think s-so... Yeah, I think that’s all I can tell you...”

Minamoto got out their notebook and began to write down everything she told them in his crooked handwriting, as Sousuke looked over his shoulder. Watching him do this wasn't anything interesting though, so despite his ruined mood, he began to look around and take some more photos of the shed. He was already planning to look at them closely once he got home. Finally, he went outside once again.

"Huh? Radish-senpai, you have some trash laying around here! Are you telling me you don't really take care of this place well enough?" He called out to her.

"Wha-? That's impossible! None of us would do that, we aren't so careless and we work hard to keep this place in good condition!" She exclaimed, rushing to his side. "Where is it!?"

"Over here. Go, fetch."

"Don't treat her like a dog!" Somehow, Minamoto materialized next to him only to serve him another smite to the head. Like always, not enough to actually hurt, but enough to be felt.

"Whah! What are you doing, lame earring! This is assault!"

"It's not! Stop exaggerating!" He replied, putting an arm around his neck.

"Then stop treating me like this! You're taking advantage of the fact that I can't defend myself! Do you enjoy this?! Do you enjoy having so much power over me?! Is this what you're into?!"

Meanwhile, Radish-senpai actually picked up the trash.

"Oh, it's a candy wrapper... I think I've seen this brand before?" She mused to herself. "But how did it end up here..."

"Wait... What if the thieves dropped it!?" Minamoto let go of him as suddenly as he grabbed him earlier, then snatched the candy wrapped from Radish-senpai's hand. "It might be a clue!"

"And how exactly is this a clue? Everyone likes candy, dumbass," Sousuke said.

"I don't exactly know how yet... but it's definitely a clue!"

He sounded so proud of himself, while not having anything to back his claim up, and Sousuke could only stare at him blankly.

"You... really are an idiot, aren't you?"

"What is this supposed to mean!"

"But what if it r-really is a clue?" Radish-senpai interrupted them. "Sometimes you don't know until you look at things closely!"

"Dunno, to me it looks like a regular candy wrapper," he replied, taking it from Minamoto. "Never seen one like this though. Anyway, I think we're done here. I'm going home."

“What? Already?” Minamoto asked. “You have anything to do?”

Be sad over a stupid thing like the photos he took getting stolen, maybe. But that’s something he was going to do on his own.

“I’m just tired of all this dumbassery,” he said out loud, directing his steps towards the exit of the garden. “Hang in there, Radish-senpai. At least until we catch the culprit.”

He wasn’t sure why he said it, but Minamoto apparently liked this response, as he bid goodbye to his friend and followed him. Even his steps sounded enthusiastic. Sousuke hated the fact that he could read his mood just from the sound of his footsteps. This definitely wasn’t normal.

It’s been a while since he realized what kind of feelings he had for Minamoto, but he still didn’t know how to deal with them.

“Still bummed out about the gardening club records?” His thoughts were interrupted before they could go any further in this direction, as Minamoto leaned into his personal space once again.

“Huh? Well, I guess...” Sousuke muttered, unable to find the energy to play tough. “I was proud of these ones...”

Minamoto stared at him for a moment, then simply stopped in his tracks, taking Sousuke’s hands and guiding him towards the nearby bench.

“W-What are you doing? Hey, if you want to hold hands with someone as cute as me you have to-”

“Wait for me here. I’ll be right back!” He said, giving him a smile and ignoring whatever nonsense he was muttering, so Sousuke just gave up and flopped down onto the bench with a sigh.

Actually, he was the one who wanted to hold hands. Even if Minamoto’s hands were so dry they could probably scratch his soft skin, because obviously a moron like that didn’t care about stuff like this.

Sousuke was beginning to think he was a lost cause, for falling for someone like him.

“I’m back! Here you go.”

Suddenly something smooth and cold touched his face and he couldn’t help but jump a little.

“Eek!”

“Come on, you’re so easily scared,” Minamoto laughed. “I bought you some juice from the vending machine. You like the peach flavor, right? Here, for you.”

For a moment Sousuke just stared up at him, feeling his eyes water. If he actually cried just because someone bought him juice to cheer him up, that would be very lame.

But he even remembered his favorite flavor.

Right now, he really just wanted a hug. If only he could reach out and pull him closer... but that was out of the question. And if he tried to do it himself, Sousuke would just instinctively call him a pervert.

“We’ll get them back, I promise!” Minamoto smiled at him brightly. “So, cheer up, Mitsuba!”

“Easier said than done!” He whined, finally taking the can of juice. “It was just... unexpected...”

“Figures,” his friend replied, flopping down onto the bench next to him. “I feel sorta bad for dragging you into this now. I didn’t wanna make you sad.”

“I’m not sad! Just tired! Geez, you can’t even recognize that.”

“Uh uh, sure.”

Sousuke just opened the can and chugged down about half of it in one go, so he didn’t have to say anything. It kinda did cheer him up a little. Just a little. Maybe he was getting greedy, with how well Minamoto treated him when compared to almost anyone else, but...

He was sad and wanted something nice, okay?

“W-What are you-” Minamoto started when Sousuke heavily slumped against his shoulder.

“Shut up. Don’t say anything. And if you even try to do anything weird to me-”

“It’s you who’s acting weird now!” He said, but didn’t move. Actually, even if he tensed at first, he soon relaxed, letting Sousuke lean on his shoulder more comfortably. “I-I guess you really are tired...”

He was given no response, so they just sat there in silence. It wasn’t awkward though, despite how strange it probably looked.

And Sousuke... felt relieved, more than anything. Relieved that the usual panic wasn't there, and he actually felt comforted by this. Because his damn crush aside, Minamoto was still his best friend, and he wanted to be close to him... or something like that.

With his camera in his lap, a half-empty juice can, and Minamoto’s warmth against his side, he thought that he could stay like that for a very long time.

...

How lame.

Meanwhile, neither of them noticed the two mysterious shadows watching them from around the corner, who just did high-five, making sure they didn't do it too loudly.

"Everything's going according to plan. Well, almost everything," Amane snickered quietly. "We'll just have to mess with them for a little longer."

"Is this really a good idea though?" Nene asked, a concerned look on his face. "I know what our goal is, but..."

"Don't worry, Yashiro, Pinkie is going to be fine! Look, he seems pretty content like this."

The girl looked back at Kou and Mitsuba, who were leaning against each other with pretty happy expressions.

"They really do like each other..."

"Told you so, Yashiro. Let's just carry on with our plan!"

Nene simply sighed, glancing at her younger friends once again, exactly when Kou decided to rest his cheek against Mitsuba's hair. It was pretty rare to see them be so peaceful.

"Yeah, let's do this."

Chapter End Notes

once again, thank you for reading!! especially to those who left comments (' ▽ ')/

gathering the evidence

Chapter Notes

hello!! here comes chapter 4, in which amane has probably too much fun, and kou gets closer to realizing something very important

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Lately Mitsuba was making him feel funny things.

He didn't know why and didn't really get that, because Mitsuba hasn't changed even a little - he was still the same whiny, fake-nice Mitsuba with an annoying voice. And yet, something felt different.

Like earlier that day, when Kou bought him that can of juice and he looked like he was about to cry. He always cried a lot, but suddenly Kou couldn't stand the thought of seeing Mitsuba cry.

And when Mitsuba rested his head against his shoulder. That really made him feel weird, but in a good way. Kou didn't get that, but at the same time didn't actually mind it. If he was being honest, he really wanted to hug him back then, but wasn't sure if that was alright. He'd probably get called a pervert if he tried, too.

Point was, something changed between him and Mitsuba, and he couldn't exactly pinpoint what. Maybe he really was stupid, because Mitsuba was his best friend and yet he couldn't even figure this out, except for the fact that being with him was making him inexplicably happy. But he was always happy to spend time with him, so he wasn't even sure where he was going with this track of thoughts.

After coming home, this was the only thing he did so far. Flop down onto his bed and think.

Even if he tried to hide it, Mitsuba seemed really upset because of the stolen photos. Kou knew this was something important to him, so he couldn't help but get kinda mad too. The thieves probably had no idea what they did, but that was no excuse. He was going to get their asses.

Suddenly, his phone rang. He didn't really expect any calls... especially not from someone he just parted ways with about an hour ago.

"Minamoto-kun, turn your computer on and check your email!" Mitsuba nearly yelled from the other side of the speaker.

"Huh? Why?"

“Just do as I say! I found something while looking at the photos I took. You have to see it!” He exclaimed, sounding so excited that Kou couldn’t say ‘no’ to this.

“Okay, okay, I’m doing this. What did you find that couldn’t wait until tomorrow?”

“Weird to admit this, but you were right about the candy wrapper, Minamoto-kun! Look at the photos I sent you, I marked some spots with a circle so it’s easier to find. There was an identical piece of trash in every club room we visited so far, we just didn’t realize!”

“Wait! Does that mean-”

“They were dropping them on purpose, hoping we’d notice! Well, I still have no idea what exactly this means, but... That’s still something, right?! We can go somewhere from here!” Mitsuba said with a laugh, and Kou felt... relieved. That he could laugh at this. He liked it way more when Mitsuba was smiling.

“Of course! Good job with this!” He replied, grinning to himself.

“Y-You don’t need to tell me this! I’m not only the cute one on this team, but also the smart one! What would you do without me, lame earring...”

“Good thing that I have you, and I don’t have to worry about that,” Kou blurted out before he even formed that thought well, and Mitsuba...

...hung up on him. *What the hell.*

“What was this supposed to mean!?” He yelled after picking his number himself.

“D-Did you even hear yourself?! That was so embarrassing!” Mitsuba replied. “Sometimes I really think that my cuteness is too much for you to handle, Minamoto-kun!”

Huh. That could be one explanation for that.

“You just love looking for problems where there aren’t any!” He said instead. “And don’t you dare hang up on me again, no matter how embarrassing I get!”

“Wait, so you can get even worse? You hella lame traffic-safety earring bo-”

That’s when Kou hung up himself. He was never going to hear the end of it tomorrow, but revenge was sweet sometimes.

He really meant what he he said though. Without Mitsuba, this whole investigation wouldn’t really get anywhere, since Kou wasn’t a good planner, and Mitsuba was way more perceptive. Like with the candy wrappers, Kou definitely would miss all of that on his own... Well, on his own it wouldn’t even be fun in the first place.

Now that he thought about it, his life would feel pretty empty without him.

For a moment he just stared at the homescreen of his phone. It was a selfie of the two of them he took when Mitsuba wasn’t looking, and since Kou had absolutely no talent for this, it

ended up being blurry and generally pretty bad, but he liked it. Mitsuba wasn't even looking in his direction, since he was talking to Yokoo, but he was smiling, and that was enough.

One of the first things Kou learned about Mitsuba was that no matter how much filth was spilling from his mouth... his smile was blinding. Seeing it once made you want to make him smile again, and again, because it was just making you feel *things*. Things that he still couldn't give a name to.

With a sigh, he dropped his phone back onto the mattress of his bed. Maybe he should talk to Nene or Amane about this... but he wasn't actually sure how helpful they'd be. He could do this on his own. Probably.

"Let's go over what we already have," Mitsuba said after he turned his chair around during the lunch break, so he could invade Kou's desk. He slammed their case files notebook open, letting Kou see that he printed out the photos he sent him yesterday, as well as some others. He also had his hair pinned to the side, as if to stop it from limiting his vision.

He looked kind of cute... well, very cute, actually, but Kou really didn't expect him to take it this seriously.

"Not even hungry? It's the lunch break, eat something," he said, trying to move the notebook but Mitsuba stubbornly kept it in place.

"I didn't bring any food today," he muttered. "That's not important anyway! We're finally making some progress, Minamoto-kun! It was your idea in the first place!"

"Well, yeah... Okay, so what do you have there?"

"Good answer, interrupting me should be a crime!" Mitsuba said with a pout. "First of all, all the thefts took place after school, on days when the particular club didn't meet up."

"Yeah. So?"

"Tch. Second, there was actually no signs of anyone breaking in. First it was a broken window, then a malfunctioning lock, and finally, a door that was left unlocked. These people clearly know what they're doing," he continued, pointing at some of the notes Kou made.

"The things that were stolen have no real value aside from the sentimental one."

"Well, whoever this is, they seem to know a lot about how things work at this school," Kou said, pulling out his bento box. "Should we talk to Akane-senpai again?"

"You think that will help us with anything? No way, no way, stupid." Mitsuba waved his hand, and only now Kou noticed he wasn't wearing his sweater. The weather was probably getting too warm even for him. "There's way too many people who know their way around the school anyway."

"Then what do you suggest, smartass?"

“That’s what I’m trying to come up with! And you’re not being helpful at all!” He whined. “The candy wrappers must be some sort of clue, but how to decipher this?!”

“I see that our detectives are working hard,” a new voice joined the conversation. “Where’s your hat, Sousuke? Not gonna wear it in class?”

“Yokoo-kun!” Mitsuba smiled at him. “There’s no way I’d put that on for everyone to see. But look, I still have this!” He reached into his bag and pulled out the magnifying glass he kind of just took from Kou’s house, then raised it to his eye. “With this, I’m still a real detective!”

“You got so into this, Sousuke,” their friend replied, patting the boy on the head. “I’m glad you’re having fun.”

“We’re hundred percent serious about this,” he said in response. “Minamoto-kun even has his kinky handcuffs-”

“Shut up if you want to survive this day,” Kou interrupted him, and Mitsuba just stuck out his tongue at him, turning back to Yokoo and Satou.

“Anyway, I’m so glad you two are here, Minamoto-kun is starving me and treating me like free labour!”

“Stop making things up!” He said, reaching out and pulling at Mitsuba’s cheek. “It’s you who didn’t bring lunch today because you’re so invested in this!”

“Ouch, ouch, ouch! Stop it, you brute! I’m gonna call for help!”

“Good to see that nothing changed,” Satou said with a sigh.

“What was even supposed to change?” He stopped stretching Mitsuba’s face as if he was a shiba inu and the boy immediately moved his chair out of Kou’s reach. With a sigh, he reached into his bag. “And you. You’re lucky I’m thinking of you too.”

“You’re thinking of me? In what way? I bet you have something lewd on your mind, perv-”

“I do not!” He replied immediately, but for some reason his face felt hot. “I made you a bento, but if you don’t want it, I’ll eat it all myself!”

“Ooh? Look how thoughtful of him, Sousuke,” Yokoo teased. “He cares about you so much.”

“How comes you never cook for us, Minamoto?” Satou asked, but Kou didn’t really pay attention to that.

The blush on Mitsuba’s face as he took the box from him was way more interesting.

“I-I bet it’s poisoned,” he muttered, but opened it anyway.

“Why would it be? I’d never do that to you!” Kou exclaimed, a little offended that he’d even think that.

Mitsuba narrowed his eyes as he stared at him without blinking for an uncomfortably long moment.

“I don’t believe you.”

“You little...!”

“But as long as you keep your promise of nursing me back to health, I’ll forgive you.”

“How heartwarming,” Yokoo laughed. “But, if the two of you are so relaxed, I bet you haven’t heard of the newest incident yet?”

At this, Kou and Mitsuba immediately ceased their banter and fell silent, turning their heads towards him.

“When...?”

“Who...?”

“Another club,” Satou said. “This time it was the astrology club... Aren’t you friends with a member of it? Yugi-senpai, I mean.”

“Amane’s club...?”

First Nene, and now him? It seemed like his friends were really unlucky. Kou was almost relieved he didn’t belong to any clubs himself, so this definitely wasn’t going to happen to him.

Mitsuba was different though. They started all of this because Kou knew Mitsuba was worried about his own club, but he’d never say it... and he joined his stupid game anyway, despite complaining. He already got upset over the stolen gardening club records. Kou didn’t even want to imagine how bad it’d be if...

A quick glance at Mitsuba told him everything. It’d be really bad. Maybe Kou really wasn’t taking this seriously enough? They should do everything they could to catch the thieves as soon as possible, so there’s no more victims.

“Minamoto-kun,” Mitsuba said quietly. “After classes are over...”

“Of course,” he replied with a nod. “We’ll go there right away.”

He received a nod in response, and a small, uncertain smile.

And for a moment, Kou really had to force himself not to take his hand and tell him everything was going to be alright.

The astrology club was located in a completely different part of the building than the previous clubs. Maybe it was because they decided to put them closer to the rooftop, in case

they wanted to do some stargazing... Sousuke couldn't really think of another reason, but it's not like it was his business. The club didn't have many members, and from the little he heard Amane talk about it, they didn't put much effort into it either, and it was mostly him who cared. Sousuke and Amane weren't really close, no, both of their personalities were too annoying for them not to clash, but they didn't dislike each other either, and Sousuke could understand having a passion for something that seemingly no one else cared about. After all, in elementary school he was all alone with his camera, too.

"Ah, I expected you guys!" Amane exclaimed when they opened the door to the club room. As Sousuke expected, he was alone. "Yashiro told me you went to see her yesterday, too, so I knew you were going to come."

"Don't assume you're so important, we could've just skipped on this one," Sousuke said, and suddenly he regretted leaving his sweater at home. The mockery wasn't complete without speaking from behind his sleeve.

"Ooh? If you did, you'd make pretty incompetent detectives, don't you think?" Amane threw it right back at him. "Well, you're here though, so you're probably serious about this!"

"You don't really seem too serious yourself though," Minamoto pointed out, looking around. "Well, this time they surely didn't get in through the window..."

"Hm? If you want to know how they got in, it's simple. Through the door," he replied, retreating further into the room to sit on the table. It looked like he really could do whatever he wanted in here.

"Broken lock again?" Sousuke tried, but Amane just shook his head.

"Nope. Either they're really good at lock-picking, or just had the key."

"The key? Wait, where do you even keep the key?" Minamoto asked with a frown.

"You already forgot?" Sousuke turned to him with disbelief on his face. "Also, were you never in any club in your life?"

"Uh uh." He shook his head. "There was never really anything that'd interest me enough."

"Why did I even expect anything else from a blockhead like you... The keys are left in the staff room, and whoever is first to arrive at the club room picks them up," Sousuke explained with a sigh.

"Pinkie is right, kid," Amane said. "Technically, nobody aside from me and my three senpais ever touches the key, but if someone got the timing right, they could take it without any issues."

Sousuke just sighed. Once again, nothing helpful. The culprits were way too clever for a stupid game like this.

"This had to happen around the time when we were in the garden with Nene-senpai... Wait, Amane, where were you back then?!" Minamoto asked suddenly, pointing his finger at the

boy in an accusatory manner.

“What, did you expect me to dig in Yashiro’s dirt with her? I’m not cut out for this, I just end up chasing bugs until she kicks me out.” Amane shrugged, and it didn’t seem like he took that accusation seriously. “I just stayed in the bathroom and did my homework. Didn’t expect for these bastards to come after my club this time.”

This seemed like something he’d do. Stay in the girls’ bathroom by himself, without even Radish-senpai to watch over him, like the absolute pervert he was.

“Someone should finally report you for the bathroom crimes, you degenerate,” he muttered.

“But I’m not doing anything. And if you’re thinking of something dirty, wouldn’t that make *you* the pervert, kid?” Amane snickered. “With the way you usually talk, I’d assume your teenage hormones are doing their job and you’re only talking shit to avoid dealing with the accusations yourself. What is it, Mitsuba-kun? Are you a pervert?”

...what the actual hell?

"Don't call him that, you pervert!" Minamoto yelled, attempting to hit him like he always did to Sousuke when he crossed the line, but Amane just dodged swiftly.

"Eeh? But he just called me this too!"

"That's... That's different!"

"So Mitsuba-kun gets a special treatment? Even though we're such good friends?"

"Mitsuba is just... Mitsuba!"

"What is this even supposed to mean?" Amane laughed. "You just treat Pinkie like he's untouchable!"

Sousuke stopped listening. Their argument didn't really matter much to him, unlike...

He wasn't a pervert, right? All he wanted was the regular stuff everyone did, like... holding hands with Minamoto, and hugging, because that seemed nice. And maybe... just maybe! He thought of kissing him, once or twice. There was nothing weird or perverted about it, everyone was doing it.

But maybe the fact that he was a boy who thought about kissing another boy was already weird enough. Radish-senpai and her crazy boyfriend could be as obnoxious as they wanted and nobody would say anything. But if he wanted to... with Minamoto...

"Hey, Mitsuba, tell him something!" Minamoto interrupted his thoughts. "Wait, why is your face all red?"

"Bet he thought about something dirty," Amane snickered.

"I obviously did not! Someone as cute as me only has pure thoughts, unlike you!" Sousuke replied. He was not going to take the bait so easily. "Anyway! Going back to the topic at hand! In the end, what did the thieves even take?"

"Oh, that's..." the boy seemed to hesitate for a moment. "Remember the stargazing event we organized a while ago?"

Of course Sousuke remembered, he took part in it too, as did a lot of other people. He wasn't a star expert by any means, but they were pretty, and he liked pretty things. Plus, he was embarrassingly ready to jump at any opportunity to spend time with his friends...

He smiled fondly at the memory. Minamoto and him had some argument in their usual style, and he ended up chasing after Sousuke until they ended up far away from the rooftop, in an empty classroom, just the two of them. Of course first he almost got tackled to the ground (he didn't even remember what he did to deserve that), but after that Minamoto just opened the windows and moved some desks closer to them, so they could sit there instead of going back to the group. He almost fell asleep on Minamoto's shoulder back then, in that classroom.

Wasn't it also when he realized he... he...

...

Admitting that he was in love was still hard, even if he was only admitting that to himself.

"Why are you bringing it up now?" Sousuke finally asked with a frown.

"Me and the other club members made maps of the sky on that day, to have something to remember it by," Amane said. "That's what the thieves took."

Hearing this, he felt his heart sink a little. Of course. He sort of expected something like this. It didn't hit that hard, since it didn't involve something he made, but... it was still a memory he was a part of, so it stung a bit.

"You really don't look too concerned," he said quietly, but Amane just smiled.

"Why should I be? It's just some scraps of paper. The most important thing, I have here," their senpai replied, putting a hand over his heart in a dramatic gesture. "I remember every single moment, and if I wanted, I could just repeat the whole event, because I know you'd all come again."

"Huh?"

"Duh, of course we'd come. We're friends after all," Minamoto stated. "Good to see at least you're in high spirits."

"What is this supposed to mean, lame earring?"

"That Amane is right. We'll get all of those things back anyway, but the most important memories are the ones in your heart! And the fact that we have each other's backs, I guess," he exclaimed with a grin, making it obvious that he was being serious.

It was weird. The fact how much Minamoto's honesty was affecting him, to the point of making his heart race.

"Ugh. So lame. You watch too much anime," he said out loud. "What about the note?"

"Ah, this one is better than the one Yashiro's club got! It's almost cute?" Amane pulled a folded piece of paper out of his pocket. "Ekhem. No matter what, you're under the same sky. Look at your present more than the past, and trust in your heart to lead you to a better tomorrow. The Phantom Thieves of Memories."

...

"I can't do this anymore, Minamoto-kun. They're so lame. I'm cringing too hard," Sousuke deadpanned. "They try to make it sound deep, but it's like a cheap love poem written by an elementary schooler. They're clever but also so lame, how is this even possible?"

"You really don't hold back, don't you?" Amane said, sounding almost impressed. "Be glad the thieves can't hear you, you could hurt their feelings."

They already hurt mine though, he thought, even if it wasn't something he wanted to admit. Everyone already treated him like a crybaby, so there was no reason to give them more material to prove it. So, instead of replying to Amane, he began to look around the room in order to find the last thing he knew he should be looking for.

"Anything else I can help you with? You know, I'm actually really curious about who the culprit is, so I'm trying to cooperate," the boy said. "What will it be, kid?"

"Huh? I don't actually know," Minamoto replied with a shrug. "This is harder than I expected."

Where could it be... Sousuke was sure it had to be there, somewhere. He looked around the shelves, then checked under the table, but there was nothing. Just where did they hide it this time...

"Mitsuba, over here!"

He turned around to see Minamoto pointing at something on top of the tallest bookcase in the room. There really was something sticking out over the edge, looking like a scrap of paper, or...

"Bingo," he muttered, walking up to it. He was obviously too short to reach it, and Amane definitely wasn't going to be of help, since he was a total midget. Minamoto was taller than him, but the difference wasn't big enough to matter here either... "Help me get up there."

"Huh?"

"Did I stutter, Minamoto-kun? Help me get up there," Sousuke repeated, making an irritated face and gesturing at the floor in front of him and hoping he'd understand.

Apparently he did.

“Uh. Sure, I guess.” Minamoto shrugged, then bent down to allow Sousuke to climb onto his back. And so he did. “Ouch, you could at least try not to stab me with your bony knees...”

“Can’t do,” he replied, grabbing onto the bookcase so they didn’t fall over. “If you drop me, you’re dead.”

“It was your idea in the first place!”

“So what? That doesn’t change anything,” Sousuke said, trying not to think about the fact that Minamoto instantly tightened his hold of him, as if worried. “Also, if you even try to touch me in any weird way, I’m telling the teachers.”

“Why would I do that?!”

“You kids seem to be having fun,” Amane commented from his spot on the table. “Watcha got there?”

Who the hell even thought a bookcase like this belonged in an ordinary club room? He’d sooner expect it in the library. Well, Amane was a huge nerd and he had some connections to professor Tsuchigomori, so there’s that... They could at least invest in a ladder though. Climbing onto Minamoto’s shoulders completely, he reached out and finally grabbed the thing he was aiming for.

“Our evidence,” he finally responded. “Okay, you can put me down now.”

“How do I even do that? Get down on your own,” Minamoto grumbled.

“Still mad over me stabbing you with my knee? Get over yourself. And what am I supposed to do, jump down?”

“Yeah?”

“I am not taking the fall damage, dumbass.”

“Just catch him, kid, and be done with this circus,” Amane sighed, as if slowly losing his patience. For the moment the two of them stayed quiet, probably wondering how to go about this.

“I guess we could do that,” Minamoto muttered. “Turn around and jump, it’ll be alright.”

“H-Huh?”

“I’m saying I’ll catch you, so don’t worry about anything!”

“Even if you say this...”

Sousuke glanced back at Amane, who looked increasingly amused, then squeezed his eyes shut and started trying to clumsily turn around without falling down. He didn’t understand why this seemed so embarrassing. Maybe it’s because the other boy was watching them, or because this was Minamoto that was involved. He wasn’t recognizing himself lately.

Well, in the end he still tripped, and things didn't go as planned.

"Woah, careful there!" Minamoto let out, but caught him at just the right moment, letting Sousuke wrap his arms around his neck and holding him securely. "You okay?"

"O-Of course, this is nothing!" He immediately pushed him away. "Let me go, weirdo!"

He didn't want to be let go of. It felt nice, to be held.

He was just stupid.

"Ah, to be young..." Amane mused to himself. "Anyway, what did you find, Pinkie?"

"T-This!" Sousuke waved the candy wrapper in the air. "I have no idea how they got it up there, but it's on every crime scene?"

"Eeeh? Do they think that the notes aren't enough?"

"Who knows? We're still trying to figure this out," Minamoto said.

Amane stared at them for a moment, then jumped off the table and skipped towards Sousuke to snatch the trash from his hand.

"Ah, I know this brand! It's hard to find them nowadays though," he announced. "I think only one shop in the town sells them. I wonder if the thieves like them or are just using these to troll you, since you probably don't even recognize them."

"Only one shop in the town...?" Sousuke and Minamoto muttered at the same time, then both jumped to Amane, grabbing him by the shoulders.

"This might be our chance!"

"Give us the address, Pervert-senpai!"

"Woah, woah, sure, but you don't have to get so close! Chill!" He instantly took a few steps back, raising his hands in a gesture of surrender. "I'll write it down for you, give me a moment. This part of the town is pretty crowded at this time of the day though..."

The two of them exchanged glances, then nodded firmly. They still had a lot of time, so they weren't going to waste it. They've been stuck without making any progress for too long, and Sousuke was getting sick of feeling like he was being toyed with while he could do nothing. How dare they, actually? Targeting someone so cute should be a punishable offense!

It seemed like another day with a lot of running around.

"Minamoto-kun, wait! Don't leave me behind!" Mitsuba whined loudly once more, after getting lost in the crowd again that day. Amane was right when telling them how busy that part of the town was, and the fact that Mitsuba was slow and clumsy wasn't exactly helping.

His only saving grace was that he was loud, and Kou could easily go back to fish out from between all the other people and drag him out by the hand.

It was getting a little annoying though.

“Agh, I’m so done with you sometimes! Can you stop getting lost for like, five minutes!?” He finally snapped, after the fourth time or so.

“It’s not my fault! I’m not used to being dragged around like this day by day! All I’m asking you is to be a little more considerate of me!”

“This happens every single time!” Without thinking much, Kou reached inside his bag and pulled out the stupid handcuffs Mitsuba insisted he carried around, just in case. His next move was taking Mitsuba’s hand and putting the unfortunate accessory around it, then putting the other side around his own. “There! Now you won’t get lost!”

The other boy just stared at their hands, joined by a short chain, then blushed furiously.

“What made you think this is a good idea?! What if you lose the key?!”

“No way, it’s safe here!” Kou reached inside the bag again to fish out said item. “I also have a spare one at home. See? It’s gonna be fine!”

“But I don’t wanna be handcuffed to you!” Mitsuba cried. “It really makes me feel like a victim of sexual harassment! Like you’re going to kidnap me so you can rough me up and do anything you want to m-”

“Be quiet, we’re in public!”

Ignoring any further protests, Kou pulled him in the direction they were going in before they were interrupted again. It shouldn’t be that far actually, but with Mitsuba getting stuck in the crowd again and again, it was taking them way too long. He didn’t understand why he was protesting against the handcuffs so much too, it was still better than the child leash his parents put him in when he was a toddler.

“Look, I think it’s here!” Kou finally pointed at a building that looked like a small candy store. He never really paid attention to it before, it looked so ordinary. He wondered how Amane learned about this place. “Let’s go inside!”

“Uncuff me first, you idiot!”

“Ah, sorry,” Kou muttered, doing as he was told. Mitsuba immediately snatched his hand away, holding it close to his chest. “Did you really hate it that much?”

“Anyone would,” he grumbled. “You don’t just handcuff people without a warning, unless you’re a cop.”

“I guess... Next time, I’ll just hold your hand then!”

For some reason, this idea actually didn't seem so bad, as he wouldn't mind holding Mitsuba's hand. It happened a few times in the past, for different reasons, but his skin was always so soft, unlike his own... and it was just generally nice to hold him, even if he always ended up pushing Kou away, like earlier, when he caught him in the astrology club room.

After a moment of seemingly considering his offer, Mitsuba just scowled.

"I think I'll take the handcuffs then."

"Rejection!"

"L-Let's just go inside!"

Almost tripping over his own legs, Mitsuba rushed towards the door, and Kou just followed him. He really had a feeling that his friend was acting kind of strange lately, but... he also couldn't figure this out either.

The store was just as small as it looked from the outside, and smelled way too sugary sweet for his liking, but Mitsuba's eyes seemed to light up the moment they entered. He began enthusiastically looking around, and even raising his camera every few seconds, snapping photos of the shelves.

"Can I help you with something, kids?"

A voice from behind the counter made them look away from the displays for a moment.

"Ah, hello!" Kou said to the old lady who was most likely tending to the shop. "We have something we wanted to ask about! Right, Mitsuba, you should've asked if you're allowed to take pics!"

"It's alright, let your friend be. He looked very excited," she replied with a smile.

"Uhm, thank you," Mitsuba muttered awkwardly, then walked up closer, only to hide behind Kou's back like he'd often do. "Come on, Minamoto-kun, ask her."

"Oh, yeah. Granny, do you remember any recent customers wearing the same uniforms as we do?"

"Stupid... if it was a girl, she'd obviously look different from us..." Mitsuba whispered to him.

The woman looked at them for a moment, as if trying to recall if anything like that happened.

"I think there was someone like that recently. The neckties are easy to recognize," she laughed a little. Kou immediately reached into his pocket.

"Were they buying these!?" He asked, feeling hopeful.

“Oh my, it’s rare for anyone to ask about these nowadays,” she replied. “They were popular years ago, but a few days ago someone indeed bought some, and I think it was a boy wearing your school’s uniform.”

“W-What did he look like?” Mitsuba stuttered out from behind his back.

“I don’t remember exactly... but i think his pants were brown, and he was shorter than both of you.”

“A high school student then...”

“Shorter than both of us...?” Kou frowned a little. They were only two people he could think of.

“Sorry that I can’t be more helpful,” the woman said with an apologetic smile. “It seems important to you.”

“It is, but don’t worry! You’ve already helped a lot! I’ll... uh... I’ll buy some of these, too!” He exclaimed, feeling as if he had to repay for her kindness somehow.

And that’s how he ended up with a bag of candy in his hands as they left the store.

There was a park nearby, and that’s where they ended up going, just to sit on the bench. This whole playing detectives thing ended up being much more complicated than Kou expected at the beginning.

“I’ll be honest here,” he started. “With that description, I can only think of of that bastard Tsukasa or Amane.”

“But... we already confirmed it can’t be Tsukasa-kun, right?” Mitsuba asked hesitantly, playing with his camera. He didn’t look too happy. “What Akane-senpai said...”

“That would leave us with Amane though, and accusing him feels weird. He was the one to direct us here after all...”

“He could’ve done that in hope to avoid suspicions,” he suggested, but he didn’t sound too convinced either. “Honestly, I just really don’t want it to be Tsukasa-kun...”

“Yeah, I know... though... why are you so scared of him in the first place?” Kou asked, receiving a frown in response.

"Seriously? Do you even need to ask? You know him, too."

"Well, yeah, I do, but it just makes me want to beat the crap out of him sometimes."

Mitsuba looked at him for a moment, as if wondering if he should tease him more or give him an honest answer, and then... opted for the latter.

"Last year... he tried to join the photography club," he said quietly, looking down, at the ground. "He quickly resigned and then joined the broadcasting club, but before that... he..."

You know, Tsukasa-kun... acts a lot like a bully.”

“Huh?”

“He mocks you and makes you do things you don't want to do with force,” Mitsuba continued. “And even when he acts nice sometimes... it probably means he wants something from you, and is trying to fool you into trusting him. I've been there before. I know all of this... He also said he was trying to bring out the real me by finally making me snap, isn't that messed up? The older kids in the club told him to leave me alone though.”

He laughed a little, but there was no humor to it. It sounded flat and forced. And of course this was messed up, Mitsuba was hiding his real self to avoid bullying in the first place. That Tsukasa bastard really had the nerve to even touch his friend- well, back then Kou and Mitsuba weren't really friends yet... so it's not like he could've defended him...

...

If it actually turned out to be Tsukasa, Kou would probably feel terribly guilty for dragging Mitsuba into this, especially now. That guy was really unpredictable after all, and with everything he just told him... risking Mitsuba's well being was never his intention after all. If anything... he was always ready to protect him, from whatever was thrown their way. Even if it was Tsukasa.

Because Mitsuba was just this important to him.

“Maybe it is Amane though. It seems possible,” he muttered. “Anyway, want some candy?”

“Mhm, sure,” Mitsuba replied gloomily, reaching inside the bag. Kou didn't like it when he was like this. Without his overly confident attitude, he always seemed so... lost. Scared. It was sort of pitiful. “Bleh, it's so bitter. Why did you even buy these? This doesn't even taste like candy.”

Kou took one too, to confirm that.

“You're right... Maybe I should give them to Amane, his reaction could tell us something,” he said, giving him a smile. “Give me a moment, I'll be right back.”

“Huh? Where are you-”

“You'll see!”

Not waiting for him to finish his question, Kou sprinted back to the shop they only just left not too long ago, trying to dig out some money from his pockets. He didn't have much left, but it should be enough. He picked a little of the thing he ever saw Mitsuba eat, even if he himself found it way too sweet.

Hopefully it's enough to cheer him up this time, he thought while running back to the park.

“Here! This is for you,” he said, sitting down and pushing the new bag into the surprised Mitsuba's arms. “Don't eat it all at once though, you'll get sick and then I'd have to take care

of you, since I promised.”

That face again. As if he was trying to hold himself back from doing something... crying, maybe. Mitsuba was so terrible with things like this, and probably way more complicated than one kid should be.

“Also... Uhm. I was wondering if...” Kou muttered, not knowing how to say this without getting utterly rejected again, so instead he just opened his arms, trying to make it obvious what he was implying but...

“Hah?” Mitsuba just uttered.

“I’m offering you a hug, you dumbass! Because you really look like you need one!”

“I didn’t ask for this,” he grumbled.

“Of course you didn’t! It’s me who’s asking, because you’d never do that!”

Kou finally lost his patience and simply pulled Mitsuba closer, wrapping his arms around him. It was awkward, of course, because he didn’t seem to know how to react and what to do with his arms, as if he hadn’t gotten properly hugged by anyone in a long time. And now that he thought about it, it could be the truth, because Mitsuba spent a long, long time being lonely.

He expected a push, but it didn’t come.

Instead, he got a pair of skinny arms closing around him with way more strength than he’d accuse him of, and a cheek rested on his shoulder.

“Don’t say anything. Just don’t,” Mitsuba mumbled into his shirt. “Just let me have this.”

“That’s the plan,” Kou replied quietly, caressing his back with one hand, and placing the other on his head. He regretted a little that he couldn’t run his fingers through Mitsuba’s hair... it seemed soft, like all of him, as he relaxed into the embrace. At first tense, soon they seemed to fit together perfectly.

For some reason, this made Kou ridiculously happy. Well, maybe not the fact that Mitsuba was sad and needed comforting - this was another thing, because sad Mitsuba was never something he wanted to see, ever. Still, he was happy that he could comfort him just like this, with a simple hug. If only he wasn’t so difficult, they could do it more often... As pink hair tingled his neck, Kou thought that he really wouldn’t mind that. Mitsuba could be as difficult as he wanted to be, but it didn’t change the fact that he was soft, smelled nice and holding him felt right.

Kou felt like he could stay like this for a really long time. He also thought that he was on the verge of figuring something out, but he still couldn’t quite grasp it.

“Bet you feel so lucky to be able to hug the cutest boy on Earth like this,” Mitsuba muttered, but it lacked the usual bite, his voice quiet and gentle.

“Mhm, maybe,” Kou replied, grinning at that. He wasn’t one to lie, after all.

Mitsuba just squeezed him more tightly.

“You can be so dumb sometimes, you know?”

“What was that for? I thought I’m a good hugger.”

“You’re warm, so you get a point for this.”

“Hm? Are you cold? Ah, is it because you didn’t bring your sweater today? I have a hoodie in my bag, you can take it.”

“Later.” Mitsuba just giggled and shifted slightly, but stayed in the same position, so Kou didn’t dare to move either.

It was fine like that. They could stay this way for a while longer.

From behind some bushes, Nene and Amane watched Kou run back to the sweets shop, leaving Mitsuba alone for a moment. The moment he did, the boy’s shoulders visibly dropped, as he let his bangs cover his face.

“This... doesn’t really feel right,” the girl said with a worried tone. “I don’t feel like this is fair to Mitsuba-kun...”

“Well... I think I might’ve underestimated how terrified of Tsukasa he is. Not that I can blame him though,” Amane sighed. “But give the kid a moment. He probably knows what he’s doing.”

They waited, and Kou returned, first giving Mitsuba a gift, then, after some attempts at convincing, hugging him.

“See? They’re going to be fine!” The boy said with a smile.

“Since when did this turn into a matchmaking attempt...” Nene said in a tired voice. “Well, I guess I don’t really mind this...I mean, look at them...”

“Total lovebirds energy, so glued to each other. Why can’t you love me like this, Yashiro?” He complained, trying to drape himself all over her, but getting pushed away.

“It’s not the right time for this, Amane-kun!”

“Why not? Our job here is done for today, we should get ready for our next... and probably last heist. But we have time for that over the weekend,” Amane said. “Right now, we’re free. I don’t really feel like watching them any longer, that’d really turn us into perverts.”

“W-Well, yeah, that’s between them... Wait, last? We’re done already?”

“We could drag this on, but you heard them. They already think it’s me. Which is good! Time for the grand finale. Hopefully, the ending of this detective story will satisfy everyone.”

Nene glanced back at the two boys they’ve been pranking for the past week, only to see them finally break the hug, so Kou could pull a hoodie out of his bag and hand it to Mitsuba, who put it on with a big smile on his face.

“Yeah, let’s hope so.”

“Now, if we’re free, should we get some candy too?” Amane asked, getting up from the grass and extending his arm to her. “I can’t let the kid beat me at being a hopeless romantic.”

“You’re anything but that, though,” she replied, but accepted the help.

“Come now, don’t be like this, Nene,” he said, the use of her first name deliberate. He rarely did it, but whenever he did, it’d turn her into a blushing mess, like right now. Taking advantage of this, he brought her hand to his lips, pressing a kiss to her fingers. “I can be romantic, too, if only you let me.”

“T-That’s... Y-You don’t... I...” Nene tried to stutter out, making him snicker at her attempts.

“Shall we go, then? We should enjoy our life as phantom thieves while it lasts. Our first heist was carried out over the weekend, so let’s finish it now, too.”

Chapter End Notes

like always, thank you for reading, kudos and comments ♪(*´▽`*)♪ we're getting closer to the conclusion of this story!

identifying the culprit

Chapter Notes

here we go!! chapter 5, in which kou finally realizes what he's been so confused about all this time, and something they've been worried about happens

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The weekend passed faster than Kou expected. Maybe it was because he had a lot to think about, starting from the possibility of one of his closest friends being behind the whole phantom thieves incident, and ending at Mitsuba... because apparently he was thinking about Mitsuba a lot lately. For whatever reason.

“Good morning, Kou-kun!” Nene’s voice reached his ears as she caught up to him on the way to school.

“Ah, good morning, senpai!” He replied, giving her a smile. Suddenly it hit him how they didn’t really spend much time together lately, since he was so busy chasing some weirdos with Mitsuba... “I’m sorry for not being around much the past week...”

“Don’t worry about this,” she said with a laugh. “I’m stuck with Amane-kun, so it’s not like I was lonely. And you have Mitsuba-kun, too.”

Something about the way she said it seemed strange. Strange in the same way as he felt lately. Maybe this was the right moment to talk to someone. If there was anyone who’d know how to explain this, and that he trusted enough, it was probably Nene.

“About Mitsuba...” He started, and momentarily felt her staring at him. Her eyes were almost shining with excitement.

“Yeah? What about Mitsuba-kun?” Nene encouraged him.

“Huh? I don’t actually know. That’s why I wanted to talk to you,” Kou said.

“You mean... you need advice?”

“Sort of?” He muttered, scratching his head. “I mean, I’ve been feeling weird about him lately, and I don’t get it, because he’s the same as always!”

“Huh? What do you mean?” The girl seemed surprised, as she gave him a puzzled look.

“Uhm... I keep thinking about him, for no reason! Because I suddenly remembered that he styled his hair differently on that day, or something. I sit behind him in class, so maybe that’s not that weird though...” Kou continued. “It’s also cute when he tries something new, I

guess... Makes me wish I could try that, but he'd probably never let me touch his hair, since I barely manage with Tiara. Wait! What was I even talking about? Ah, yeah! I keep wanting to hug him, too! Especially when he looks sad, but not only then, since I don't wanna see him sad anyway... He's so nice to hug though! And I think he looks good wearing my hoodie!"

"Kou-kun... How long is this rant going to be?" Nene asked awkwardly. "I'm not really sure what are you confused about here..."

"What do you mean? Isn't all of this weird? I never thought this way about Amane, or Satou, or Yokoo-"

"That's probably because you're in love with Mitsuba-kun, and not any of them," she said, sounding a little embarrassed. Kou, in turn, immediately stopped in his tracks, as if his brain stopped processing basic actions like walking.

"I'm in love with Mitsuba?" He repeated, more to himself than to Nene.

"W-Wait, you never realized this?!"

"N-Not really..."

It's not like he never liked anyone that way. Actually, he even thought he liked Nene not too long ago... Like, his face was feeling hot and his heart was beating faster whenever she got too close, and he thought she was really cute and all... That's what it's like to have a crush on someone, right? But then Nene got together with Amane, and he found out he didn't mind that at all. It was the opposite, he was happy for them.

But with Mitsuba... it felt somewhat different. They were always poking and pushing each other, so having him close didn't make him panic. If anything, Mitsuba's touch was calming, even if harsh sometimes. It became a constant in his life, so how different holding him down because he was being insufferable could be from holding him gently, because he liked his closeness? Well, yeah, it was pretty different, but still... Kou also did think Mitsuba was cute. He had pretty eyes, soft skin and the cutest smile he'd ever seen. Whenever he smiled, Kou found himself smiling, too.

Would he mind it if Mitsuba found himself someone he liked more than he liked Kou? Would he be jealous, if he decided to spend more time with that someone, rather than him?

He tried to imagine it, and he found himself not really liking the result. He'd probably accept it, but... he'd also be so worried. Worried if that person wouldn't hurt him, if he'd be happy like that... because he wanted Mitsuba to be happy, of course. When he was with Kou, he could at least make sure he was doing everything he could to make that a reality.

"Oh god," he muttered, feeling his face turn red as he covered it with his hands. "I'm so stupid."

"I wouldn't put it like that, but..." Nene chuckled, sounding as if she was even more embarrassed for him now. "You might be a little slow sometimes."

"This is not funny! What if I already did something weird because of this? He always calls me a weirdo, so it's not like I'd realize!"

"Why are you panicking now?" She asked, grabbing his hands and trying to pry them away from his face. "I doubt you did anything wrong!"

"I can never know with him!"

"But I'm pretty sure Mitsuba-kun likes you, too!"

"Huh?" Kou let out, looking at her from between his fingers. "H-How can you tell?"

"Uhm... A girl's intuition?" She replied hesitantly. "Trust me, uninvolved people can see it better than you!"

"Oh god. Oh god... What am I supposed to do now?"

"I think you really should calm down first, Kou-kun..."

"R-Right... Sorry, senpai..." He muttered, taking a deep breath. "But also... thank you. F-For making me realize this..."

"Don't worry about it." Nene waved her hand with a smile. "What are friends for, after all? I'm glad to be of help."

"Of help with what, Radish-senpai?"

Both Kou and Nene jumped a little, suddenly hearing Mitsuba's voice without noticing him earlier. They were so absorbed by the matter at hand that they didn't even realize when he walked up to them and poked Nene's shoulder.

"What are you two doing here?" He asked them with a frown that soon twisted into a grin. "Ah, are you maybe discussing ditching Pervert-senpai and going out together? I didn't suspect you of cheating on him, but-"

"It's not this at all!" She protested. "How is your brain even giving you these ideas, Mitsuba-kun?!"

The boy just snickered.

"I wouldn't blame you for that, Minamoto-kun seems like a better catch than that guy," he replied, and...

Kou found himself blushing uncontrollably at this statement.

Was he always saying stuff like that, and he just didn't notice because he wasn't aware of his own feelings? Or was this a one time thing? He couldn't even tell.

"Not that he's much better. He's a three out of ten at most, when Pervert-senpai is a two," Mitsuba added, sticking his tongue out at him, and suddenly Kou felt calm again. This

seemed more like the Mitsuba he knew.

“I-In any case, nothing like that took place!” Nene exclaimed. “I’ll be going now, I don’t want to be late. See you later, Mitsuba-kun, Kou-kun!”

With this, she ran off towards the school gates, clutching at her bag and leaving the two of them alone.

“You... didn’t hear what we were talking about, right?” Kou asked, a little scared of the answer.

“Are you accusing me of eavesdropping? Of course I didn’t,” Mitsuba replied with a sigh. “What, were you really planning something nasty? You seem so concerned, Minamoto-kun.”

He was so relieved that he couldn’t even get mad at him for this, and... only now Kou noticed he was wearing the hoodie he lent him before the weekend. It seemed out of his usual aesthetic, so probably everyone would realize it didn’t belong to him, but... it really suited him. Kou didn’t even have the heart to tell him to give it back, and maybe... maybe he didn’t even mind if others realized who it actually belonged to.

“It’s nothing you should worry about,” he said in the end, looking away so it didn’t seem like he was staring, and finally starting to walk towards the gates too. “Let’s go, or we’ll actually be late.”

“So you trust Radish-senpai more than me? That’s so unfair!” Mitsuba cried, following him. “Of course, I can never compete against her!”

“Why would you want to compete against her? She is her, and you are you,” Kou said, confused. “You’re important to me as you.”

The moment he said it, Mitsuba’s face flushed pink.

Oh. *Oh.*

“W-Well... She even calls you by your first name and all...” He mumbled, clearly flustered, staring at the ground instead of Kou. “I-It just seems nice because your first name is so short! Don’t get any wrong ideas!”

Would these ideas really be wrong though?

“You can use it too, if you want. I never said you can’t,” he replied. “Just call me Kou.”

Mitsuba raised his head to look at him, blinked slowly, and then stared at him for a bit longer.

“Uhm. Kou,” he finally uttered, scratching his cheek awkwardly. “Ugh, now this really feels weird....”

“Sousuke.”

“Wha-!”

“Your name, duh,” Kou laughed at his reaction, the expression that seemed like a mix of ‘taken off guard’ and ‘extremely happy’. “It’s only fair.”

“I... It’s not the right time for this, stupid lame-ass traffic-safety earring! We’re gonna be late!” He blurted out, turning away from him and rushing to run towards the school building.

He could try to fool him, but he couldn’t hide the smile he had on his face. Maybe Kou really was stupid for not realizing it earlier, when it seemed so obvious now, when he put a name to it, but...

Loving Mitsuba... Sousuke... was easy. Easy, and so natural that he didn’t even realize this feeling was love. Of course Sousuke wasn’t perfect, with all the stack of insufferable traits he had, but once someone got to know him, they could see that there’s so much more there. He was caring, in his own way. He was very observant and would sometimes notice that something bothered Kou even before he himself did. He cherished the time he spent with his friends, and remembered the smallest things. And while he had a terrible sense of humor, Kou somehow came to find it entertaining too. Because Sousuke was just so much fun to be around, and he could never be bored when with him. He was simply bringing a lot of color into his life.

“Are you coming or not, Mi-” Sousuke called out to him from the distance, but cut himself off before finishing with the brightest grin he had seen in a while. “Kou!”

He was pretty sure his heart skipped a beat.

Running up to join him, Kou really felt stupid now.

“Sooo... Summing up the evidence we have against Pervert-senpai,” Sousuke said during the lunch break, pointing at the notes he made over the weekend. “The first theft was discovered on Monday, so it most likely happened on Saturday. The astrology club meets up on Saturdays, but...”

“Nene-senpai and Amane often stay at school until late. He could’ve done it after the club activities, or just... not go, I guess?” Kou replied.

“We stayed long on that day too, I think...”

“Oh, right! I was helping you practice your cooking skills, since you’re doing so bad in home ec class!”

“You didn’t have to remind me of this,” he muttered, giving him a glare. He wasn’t as much ‘bad’ as... kind of clumsy. “Anyway. I’m assuming Radish-senpai is his accomplice, since we already established there’s more than one of them.”

“Well... Yeah, it’d be surprising if she wasn’t involved,” his friend admitted.

“The gardening club meets on Mondays and Fridays, and the astrology club on Saturdays and Wednesdays. These are the days on which these two could have an alibi. The second theft happened on Monday and was discovered on Tuesday... So, Pervert-senpai has no alibi for this,” Sousuke continued. “Also! We ran into them on Thursday, so, on the day when neither of them had any excuse.”

“Now that you mention it, they were acting kinda strange!” Kou exclaimed, leaning closer to him.

“Personal space,” he said, pushing him back to his previous position. He had enough embarrassment for one day already. “But it’s mostly Radish-senpai who acts strange. Or more like, her acting skills are crap.”

“You don’t have to be so mean about it...”

“It’s just the truth! Since my acting skills are superior, I can say this. She’s too honest for her own good,” Sousuke replied. “That’s why, when she tries to lie it comes out all stuttery, because she’s too nervous. Pervert-senpai’s acting is good though. He makes himself suspicious in different ways.”

“Huh? What ways?”

“Feigning ignorance. He pretends to know too little for someone like him. You know, I believed Akane-senpai with what she said about Tsukasa-kun, but I do not believe that Amane-senpai didn’t know about this.”

“Makes sense,” Kou hummed in response. “To be honest... I think he might’ve brought up Tsukasa just to distract you from... you know, whatever he himself was doing.”

Sousuke’s hand turned into a fist as he stared at the page filled with words and clues that he tried so hard to put together. This did seem like an Amane kind of move, even if it was probably kind of... insensitive. Well, it’s not like Sousuke belonged to the most subtle people either, so he didn’t really have any right to be mad at him. It’s not like he did send Tsukasa after him or something, he wouldn’t do that.

That is, if Amane was truly behind all of this.

“The fact that both the gardening club and the astrology club were targeted also seems suspicious,” he said, leaving Kou’s words with no comment. “It just made things easier for them, since they have full access to the places they take care of...”

“The astrology club room had no weak spots too, you can’t get in without the key,” Kou added. “And Amane could easily get it.”

“The most important questions that remain are... where are they hiding the things they stole, and... why are they doing this at all,” Sousuke sighed, resting his chin on his hand. Now that the suspicions landed on Radish-senpai and her boyfriend, he couldn’t really feel mad, but at the same time he was almost sure they did all of this on purpose. Then... what was their

goal? What were they trying to tell them, with a plan like this? So far all Sousuke got was exhaustion and a foggy feeling that he was missing something important.

He still didn't get this at all.

"Hey, Kou?" He asked, still testing how the name felt on his tongue. The conclusion he was reaching was that it felt really, really nice.

"Hmm?"

"Can I come over today? I'll even help you with dinner, or something," Sousuke muttered into the sleeve of his borrowed hoodie. He still didn't give it back, and Kou didn't ask for it either.

"You can come over anytime, you know this," Kou replied. "There's always enough space for you, Sousuke."

Both the response, and Kou using his name... He just closed his eyes and smiled to himself, hoping he wouldn't comment on it. He just wanted to let himself dream for a moment.

He really was hopeless.

"Eeeh? Did something happen between you two?" Yokoo's voice interrupted the moment, and for the first time ever, he wasn't really glad to hear him. "You're so quiet today. And what was that, first name basis?"

"Don't tease them too much, we usually can't go a day without them screaming at each other," Satou said.

"Well, hello to you too," Sousuke grumbled. "Are you bringing bad news again?"

"About that..." Yokoo started hesitantly, scratching his cheek. "You're not really gonna like this one though..."

"What do you mean?" Kou asked, raising one brow.

"You've been taking a break from your club, right, Mitsuba? To deal with this nonsense first," Satou said. "You probably haven't heard yet... Well, we've been going out during the break to scout some info for you for the past week, so I guess that's our job now, breaking the news to you."

"Just get to the point," Sousuke replied, having a really bad feeling about this.

"Okay, okay. It's the photography club this time. Sorry."

...

Without thinking much, Sousuke got up, almost knocking over the chair he was sitting on in the process. Not even sparing them a look, he ran out of the room, barely avoiding crashing into some of his classmates because he was too impatient to take a longer route. He didn't

even care the break would be over soon, he just ran in the direction of his club room, hoping someone was there so the door would be unlocked.

“Hey, Mi- Sousuke, wait!” Kou caught up to him in the corridor leading to his destination, grabbing his hand.

“For what?!”

“For me, dumbass! I’m going with you, of course!” He exclaimed, squeezing the hand he was holding. “We’re in this together, right?”

Sousuke took a deep breath and counted to ten to calm down, focusing on the firm touch. It was sort of helping. Keeping him from getting too anxious.

“Right. I’m not going to apologize for this though.”

“You don’t have to, just don’t leave me behind next time,” Kou said, placing his other hand on his head and petting him. As if he was a child... He couldn’t stop himself from just accepting it though. He was so starved for any kind of affection, it was sort of pathetic. Even that hug the other day... “Let’s go, okay?”

“Mhm. I guess that’s all we can do...”

Just like Sousuke hoped, the door wasn’t locked. It’s not like he could prepare himself for what was waiting for him, so he just entered the room, with Kou following close behind him. He immediately recognized some of his senpais.

“Uhm, excuse me...?”

“Oh, Mitsuba-kun! Did someone tell you what happened?” A girl from high school asked, looking concerned. “I thought you were busy with something else...”

“This is related, senpai,” he said. “We’re trying to find out who’s behind these incidents, so... I’d like to hear what happened...”

“We’re not exactly sure... Well, we don’t know how they got in, at least. They had to get a hold of the key somehow...”

Amane knows how to do that.

“What did they take?” Sousuke asked hesitantly. This was the thing he was the most scared of.

“Uhm... Just don’t take it too personally, okay? We still have all of this in saved on the club computer,” another senpai said. “They took one of the recent photo albums we made... A lot of the photos in it were taken by you though, so we hoped we wouldn’t have to tell you so soon...”

“You were in charge of the entrance ceremony this year, right? They took that album.”

...

“Sousuke?” Kou nudged him gently with his elbow, but he didn’t react.

“The note? They always leave a note.”

The girl who spoke first exchanged glances with her friend, then handed Sousuke a small piece of paper.

“Here you go.”

We can only steal this much, the memories you try so hard to preserve in physical form. We cannot steal your heart though - only you can offer it to someone.

~ *The Phantom Thieves of Memories*

What was this even supposed to mean? What the hell did they even want from him?

Squeezing the note in his hand, he took a few steps back, towards the door, and finally turned around and... ran away. It seemed like this was all he was good for.

He could hear Kou calling out to him, but he was too busy trying not to cry to actually stop and listen to him. He didn’t even think of where he was going, actually, just let his feet carry him.

And that’s how he ended up on the stairs leading to the rooftop. In the past, when keeping up his fake facade was beginning to be too much, he’d sometimes come up there to clear his mind... He hadn’t felt the need to do that in a pretty long while though. The fact that he still automatically came here felt like he didn’t change at all. He was still the same old, weak and pitiful Mitsuba Sousuke.

The tears that gathered in his eyes blurred his vision, making him trip over a step and fall to his knees. It’d probably hurt if he was even paying attention to this.

“I’m not even gonna ask you if you’re okay, because I can tell you’re not.” Somehow, Kou’s voice reached him, as the boy sat down close to him and helped him into a sitting position too. “I told you to stop leaving me behind though.”

“You don’t get this! It’s not something you can understand!” Sousuke snapped, but Kou looked unimpressed.

“Not if you don’t tell me anything. And I think it’s high time you did,” he replied. “I’ve had enough of watching you be miserable over something I don’t get. What’s so special about that album they took?”

“Didn’t you hear? It’s from the entrance ceremony-”

“So?”

“You really don’t get this,” Sousuke said, and the dam finally broke, letting the tears roll down his face. “I-It wasn’t just the first years. It was when I found out I’m going to be in the same class as you, and Yokoo-kun, and Satou-kun...”

“Huh?”

“T-That album, it had photos of you standing near the board with the name lists,” he nearly sobbed out, trying to wipe the tears off but there was simply more coming. “I was so happy when you found my name on that list. B-Because I wouldn’t be alone this year anymore! And I always have to take photos... of moments important to me... So I did! They were put in that album too, and they...”

"Sousuke," he heard, and then felt a pair of hands wrapping around his waist and pulling him closer. "Shh, it's alright..."

"It's not!" He tried to push Kou away, but he was holding him firmly, so he just gave up the moment another loud sob forced its way out. "Why would they do this...? They understand this... right? That this means so much to me..."

"I don't know," Kou said, gently coercing him to rest his head on his shoulder, placing a hand on his hair. "But I'm going to kick Amane's ass for this, for sure."

Sousuke snorted with laughter between the tears, but it came out as a rather pathetic sound. Giving up completely, he raised his arms to wrap them around Kou's neck and cling to him as he continued to cry.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Just let this out,” he muttered into Sousuke’s hair, caressing his back. “Maybe I really don’t get how you feel, but... I’m happy we’re in the same class, too. I don’t need photos for that because you’re right here.”

This, for some reason, made him cry even harder. It was such a cheesy thing to say, but it was just so *Kou* that it put him at ease. And yet, he was still a sobbing mess, even though he felt so safe like this.

Maybe it was exactly because of this though. He could cry his eyes out like this because he knew Kou wasn’t going to mock him for it. He never did it after all, not the first time, after he saved his ass, not anytime later. There was nobody he trusted more than him.

They sat like that for a while, glued to each other in a hug, most likely having missed the beginning of the next class because the bells couldn’t even be heard there.

“I really hope Yokoo-kun and Satou-kun had enough common sense to tell the teacher I felt sick or something,” Sousuke finally mumbled into Kou’s shirt. “No one would even ask where you are.”

“I guess they’d just assume I went with you,” he laughed quietly, and Sousuke smiled at this a little. He was tired and his face felt sticky, but there was no embarrassment here. They were

past that at this point. “Are we going back though?”

“We have to. We left our things there... I don’t really wanna go back right now though.”

“Got it. Skipping one class never killed anyone.”

“Your brother is going to be mad at me for dragging you onto the wrong path.”

“He’ll understand! And if not, I’ll protect you from him.”

“Eeeh, going against your own family, all for the poor little me?” Sousuke teased. “You’re a weirdo.”

“You’re no better!”

Sousuke knew that. He was aware of the fact that he was weird, and that not many people were going to accept him like that.

But Kou did. The same Kou who didn’t even pay attention to him when he was playing nice, reached out to him the moment he dropped his mask. And he, like a total idiot, couldn’t help but fall in love with the person who was an even bigger idiot than him.

There was probably no one better he could fall in love with though. He didn’t envy Radish-senpai or Amane at all... even if his feelings weren’t going to be returned.

“Skipping all of what just happened...” He muttered, finally reluctantly pulling away from their hug, but still keeping his hands on Kou’s shoulders. “What are we going to do now?”

“Uhm... catch Amane and force the truth out of him?” Kou suggested.

“There’s no way that’s gonna work, dumbass,” Sousuke replied, wiping his face with his sleeve. “Ugh... It’s so hard to think now, but... they need to have some sort of base of operation, right? And I doubt it’s the bathroom...”

“You mean like, place where they hide the stolen stuff and all?”

“What else could I mean? It has to be a place that wouldn’t be so easily connected to them... somewhere not many people go in the first place, so nobody would discover anything...but one they’re familiar with...”

For a moment they stared at each other, then both of them turned in the direction of the door located just a few steps away from them, then back to each other.

“The rooftop!”

“Ah, here you are! I’ve been looking for you all over the school!” Yokoo’s voice interrupted them once again that day, and Sousuke instinctively shoved Kou away. “We told the teacher you went to the infirmary, but it’s been a while and she got worried, so she sent me to check up on you...”

“E-Everything’s alright!” He replied to that. “W-We’ve been just, uh... Kou dragged me here against my will!”

“This did not happen,” Kou said, poking his cheek.

“Huh. Your voice sounds weird, Sousuke, but I’m going to let that slide,” Yokoo commented. “Sorry for interrupting, too. You should probably come back with me though, if you don’t want anyone to think anything.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” Kou asked.

“You two are pretty obvious,” he replied with a smile, and suddenly Sousuke understood. “Don’t worry, neither me nor Satou mind it.”

They knew, about how he felt about Kou, and they didn’t think it was weird. Maybe... he wasn’t so alone with this after all. Maybe there were people who were cheering on him.

“I don’t get it,” Kou just sighed, getting back to his feet and taking Sousuke’s hand to pull him up too. “After school, we’ll get this over with, and we’ll get back the stuff that’s important to you. Trust me, it’ll be fine!”

“Haaah? You keep saying this, and look where it got us!” He said, but at the same time didn’t let go of his hand, instead tightening his hold. “You better keep this promise!”

“You bet I will!

“Glad to see you guys never change.” Yokoo just commented cheerfully. “But you should probably wash your face, Sousuke.”

“Oh, right, anyone would be able to tell that you cr-”

“Both of you, shut up!”

This was going to be... another very long day. But they were almost at the finishing line, so they had to see it through to the end.

“So, did you manage to get what I asked you for, Yashiro?” Amane asked when the girl arrived back in their classroom at the end of the lunch break.

“Mhm,” Nene mumbled, giving it to him with a sour expression. “I know I asked this many times before, but... are you really sure this is a good idea? I mean, Mitsuba-kun...”

Amane thought about the answer for a moment, but in the end still nodded.

“I’ll probably have some apologizing to do once it’s all over, but... we can’t back out now, can we? If we did, all of this would be meaningless.”

“I suppose...” Nene muttered. “Then, today, after school.”

“Yep! I’m looking forward to it. Hopefully, everything will go as planned,” Amane replied with a grin. “But since you told me about what happened this morning, I have confidence that our son can figure this out.”

“Kou-kun is not our son!”

“Don’t kick him out of the family, Yashiro! I’m sure he’d be disheartened by this.”

“Since when are we... No, nevermind, sometimes there’s just no use trying to debate with you,” she sighed, but Amane only snickered.

Just a little longer, and his perfect plan was either going to become a huge success, or a big failure. Now it all depended on the kids themselves.

Chapter End Notes

i really am just using amane to speak for me, ahaha... as you can probably guess, next chapter will be the most important one. i hope those who are sticking with this story will look forward to it!! ✧ʘ(•̀ゝ•́●)✧ and as always, thank you for reading!

the confession

Chapter Notes

i don't really have anything to say about this chapter, i think the title says enough about what you can expect~

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Kou didn't really understand Sousuke a lot of times. He was trying, of course, but he wasn't sure how well he was doing. Especially today.

He didn't really get why his friend was so attached to the photos he was taking. They were nice, Sousuke was good at what he was doing after all, but to Kou they didn't really have much value outside of the fact that Sousuke was the person who took them. Maybe it was because he had no artistic sense, or maybe it really was something he couldn't understand. Like, he had a few photos with Sousuke printed out and put over his desk too, but in the end, nothing could replace the real thing.

The real thing, who was still looking at him with an expression way more gloomy than he'd like it.

"Okay, so... Should we, like, check the rooftop right away, or..." Sousuke started when they were finally left alone in the room, once classes were over. "...try talking to them first? Radish-senpai probably haven't gone to her club activities yet."

"To be honest... Will she go at all?" Kou replied, picking up his bag. "I have a feeling that they want to end this today, too."

"I actually hope so, because I don't have the energy to drag this on," he sighed heavily. He even put his camera in his bag, which was unusual. "Let's try with the bathroom first then, I suppose..."

"Mhm." Kou just nodded in response, not really knowing how to behave. He wanted to cheer him up somehow, it almost hurt to watch him like this, but... he wasn't sure if there was anything he could do now. Would holding his hand be alright? Would it reassure him somehow, or would he just get annoyed?

In the end, they just ended up walking to the girls' bathroom on the third floor in silence, most likely wondering how this confrontation would go.

"I hope Radish-senpai and Pervert-senpai are here at all, if they aren't it's going to be another disappointment-" Sousuke said when they finally reached their destination and went through its door, but-

It seemed like he said that too soon.

“So you’re finally here, kids!” Amane’s voice reached them from behind their backs, and they were too surprised to react in time, even dropping their bags to the floor. “You’ll have to forgive me this one.”

Suddenly Kou felt cold metal around his wrist, and when he looked down, sure enough, he could identify it as his stupid handcuffs.

It wasn’t also difficult to notice he got chained to Sousuke once again, this time not out of his own free will.

“How did you-” he tried to ask, but Amane answered even faster than that.

“Silly you, leaving your bag unguarded during the lunch break was a mistake! It was easy to just send Yashiro to get these for me,” he exclaimed cheerfully, but then his voice became lower and more threatening. “You’re so easy to trick. Be glad it’s just me, someone else could take advantage of this trait of yours.”

“You bastard-” Kou tried to turn around, but he quickly realized it wasn’t so easy in this situation.

“Hey, I know it’s not you who did this, but be more careful, idiot!” Sousuke whined, grabbing his hand, the one they were handcuffed by. “This thing hurts when it digs into your skin!”

“Ah, sorry, sorry!”

By the time they found a way to cooperate like this, Amane was already gone, and all they could do was storm out of the bathroom after him.

“You’re so slow! This way you’ll never be able to catch me!” He called out from a distance before running off again, but it wasn’t hard to guess in the direction of what he was going.

“The rooftop!”

“You don’t have to tell me this!” Sousuke simply grabbed his hand firmly, as if to make running after Amane earlier, so the chain connecting them didn’t bother them. Kou took it as a sign to just go with it.

It didn’t take them long to reach the rooftop, and it seemed like the culprit wasn’t even trying to hide, as the door was wide open. Not thinking much, they left the building and emerged into the warm weather of the late afternoon.

But it didn’t look like anyone else was there, as they looked around in confusion.

“Did he trick us again...?” Kou muttered, and he didn’t have to wait long for an answer once again.

“I sure did! You really are so slow like this,” Amane said, and upon turning around (which must’ve looked funny to him), they finally spotted him, sitting just above the door leading inside and looking down on them. “I was beginning to get bored.”

“You! So you’re the one behind all of this, just like we thought! Get down here so I can kick your ass for making Sousuke sad!”

“Hey, you don’t have to-” His friend started quietly, but Kou was too focused on Amane already.

The boy’s eyes went wide as he listened to them, but then he just grinned.

“First name basis, huh? Well, mister and mister detective, seems like I indeed have to confess my crimes! The Phantom Thief of Memories, it was me all along. And my dear assistant Yashiro... but she was probably only making us more suspicious,” he said. “I’m glad you accepted my challenge, because it was directed at you since the beginning!”

“We realized somewhere along the way,” Sousuke replied. “At least I did, can’t speak for the hell-lame traffic-safety earring guy over here.”

“Hey!”

“But I need to know one thing!” He continued, raising his voice. “What were you trying to show me?! It’s not about Kou, right?! It’s me!”

“Who know?” Amane replied with a smile. “I can’t tell you, that’d defeat the purpose of this entire game. You have to look into your heart, Pinkie. Oh, also, the treasure I took is safe. You can take it back once you look around here and find it.”

“Listen, I’m getting tired of your bullsh-”

Not letting him finish, Amane jumped down to the floor, just in front of the door.

“So, to do that, and to reach your answer, you’ll stay here for a while.”

“Wha-”

Just like that, he turned around and disappeared inside, closing the door with a loud thud. Kou felt Sousuke pull him in that direction, so he let him lead, but before they even reached it they heard the sound of the key turning, locking them there.

“H-Huh? This isn’t funny, let us out!” Sousuke yelled, slamming his free hand against the door. Kou in turn tried to pull at the handle, but it was useless. He wasn’t good with precise things like lockpicking either...

“Amane, you bastard!”

“You’ll thank me for this! I’ll let you out later, so take your time!”

“That’s it. I’m going to murder him with my own two hands,” Sousuke said casually, but Kou has never seen him look this threatening before. “I’ll even apologize to Radish-senpai, but he’s not getting out of this alive.”

“Come on, murder is a little-”

“Too much? Screw him!” He finished Kou’s sentence, and then tried to kick at the door, but all he managed to achieve was lose his balance and almost drag Kou with him. “I hate this so much...”

For a moment, neither of them seemed to know what to do. There they were, handcuffed together and locked out of the school building, stuck on the rooftop, thanks to their weirdo of a friend who decided they (or Sousuke himself?) needed to figure something out.

Kou just sighed. He had enough revelations for one day already, considering that just this morning he realized he was in love with Sousuke. Like, he’d been in love for a while, just didn’t realize it, but...

“Let’s just look around, if we’re stuck here anyway,” he finally said.

“You seem awfully fine with this situation,” his friend grumbled. “All alone with me, and me being unable to run-”

“Y’know, I can’t run from you either.” Kou pointed at their hands, chained together. “But if I have to be stuck with someone, I think I’m okay with it being you.”

He kind of expected the reaction he got. Since Sousuke’s hair was a mess from all the running earlier, he could see both of his eyes widen as he pressed his lips together, trying to hide his smile.

He was so pretty like this. Kou really wished he could just hold him close and run his fingers through his hair, but... something like that probably required a confession... and then being accepted...

“W-Well, if you insist, we should probably look for the stolen stuff! It’s not like we have anything else to do...” Sousuke exclaimed, quickly looking away. “Though it doesn’t really seem like there’s many places where they could hide something...”

“What’s this though?” He replied, pointing at the floor. There was something that looked like an arrow drawn with chalk, which lead to another arrow, and then another.

“This is too easy!

Following the arrows, they arrived near the fence surrounding the rooftop, finding one tile circled with the chalk. *Try to lift it!* was scribbled next to the circle.

“They’re not even trying anymore...” Sousuke muttered, dropping to his knees and pulling Kou to do the same. Lifting the tile wasn’t difficult either, it came off easily, revealing a hole underneath it. “I never knew there was something like that here...”

“Amane knows a lot of weird stuff about this school, and I have no idea how he’s finding out about all of this...” Kou said with a sigh. He was pretty sure even Teru didn’t know this much about this place, and he was the school council president. “I’ll hold this up, and you get out everything that’s inside.”

They did just that, and soon they were sitting on the floor surrounded by all the items stolen over the past week. It wasn’t easy to look through them with their arms constantly colliding with each other, but it seemed like everything was there, judging from what the club members told them.

“Thank god.” Sousuke hugged the album stolen from the photography club with one hand, smiling gently. “It was safe...”

“You seem really relieved...”

“Of course I am, it should be obvious! I didn’t rant about how important it is to me only for you to forget that the next second!”

“I didn’t forget!” Kou protested. “Can I... at least see the photos you mentioned?”

“You don’t know crap about photography anyway...”

“Doesn’t matter! It’s important to you, so I want to see!” He insisted, and he could just see Sousuke’s reluctance melt away. Of course he was going to show him, there was no way he was going to miss an opportunity to show off.

“Well... okay then...”

He placed the album on the floor, then began flipping through the pages until he found the right one.

“This is where photos from the entrance ceremony start... I was asked to go to the high school one, so these are mine.” He pointed at some pictures. They looked pretty normal, at least to Kou. “Here, look. It’s Radish-senpai and her idiot boyfriend. You can barely see them, but it’s them... And here’s Akane-senpai and Aoi-senpai.”

“No Tsukasa anywhere?” Kou asked teasingly, but Sousuke just grinned.

“I skipped him on purpose.”

“Good job, Sousuke from the past.”

“Of course!” He moved to switch the pages. “Here are the ones I mentioned before... There’s you, and Yokoo-kun, and Satou-kun... and this one, it’s just you. I caught you calling out to me... You look so stupid in this one, there should be an award for being the worst model ever.”

“Shut up... it’s not that bad.”

“Obviously, because I’m still an amazing and very talented photographer! I can make even you look good.”

Kou stared at the photos, and something seemed off about them to him. They were all good, he couldn’t deny that, but...

“You’re not in any of them...”

“Huh? Why would I be? I’m the one who took them, dumbass,” Sousuke replied, clearly confused.

“But... wouldn’t they make better memories, if we were in them together?”

“That would be missing the point...”

Kou couldn’t help but sigh.

“I really don’t get you...” He said, then leaned back until he was lying flat on the tiles, pulling at the handcuffs a little. “Come on, lie down too, it’s not like we have anything to do.”

“The floor is dirty.”

“You’re wearing my hoodie anyway. If you give it back, I’ll wash it.”

Sousuke just huffed quietly, then put the album away with surprising gentleness, to finally lie down next to him.

For a pretty long moment, there was just silence, interrupted by the occasional sounds of birds. They were probably supposed to talk about something, but Kou didn’t really know what, and Sousuke didn’t seem to want to start the conversation either... so, they continued to lie there, just like that.

“The sky is pretty today,” Kou said after a while, breaking the silence. It seemed like such an empty thing to say though, even if it wasn’t a lie. He’d been staring at the sky for the past several minutes after all, he knew it was pretty, and his friend probably also did.

“Mhm,” Sousuke hummed in response. “I wish I had my camera. If Pervert-senpai does something with it...”

“I doubt he would. And why would you need it now?”

“To take a photo of the sky, obviously. Are you an idiot? Wait, don’t even answer this, I know you are.”

“Just enjoy the moment,” Kou sighed again. “You don’t need to take photos of everything, you know? The real thing is always so much better than a reflection. Look at the world with your own eyes, not through the camera screen. ”

Sousuke didn't respond this time, so maybe Kou hit something he wasn't supposed to hit. Even if he did, it's not like Sousuke could get up and leave. He couldn't even move to another part of the rooftop...

These thoughts were deemed unnecessary the moment a soft hand grabbed his own, holding it hesitantly.

"Maybe you're right. Maybe I should do that," Sousuke said quietly.

...

Suddenly, Kou felt unsure of what he should do. Where this was going to lead. He was... a little scared, probably. Scared of their relationship changing irreversibly, but...

Would that change be a bad thing? If he and Sousuke grew just a little closer, held hands more often, hugged whenever they wanted, and maybe even kissed, if they felt like it... would that be bad?

He couldn't find anything wrong with that. Feeling a little more confident, he withdrew his hand from Sousuke's hold, only to twine their fingers together.

It felt better like this, more right. They fit together way too well, like they were meant to be.

Turning his head to the side, he realized Sousuke did the same, watching him with an expression he'd never seen before.

He really wanted to kiss him, right now.

"Hey, tell me," he said instead. "Why are you always taking so many photos? What's so important about them?"

Sousuke closed his eyes, and Kou already regretted not being able to look into them.

"You won't understand this."

"Then explain it to me. I'm stupid, you have to talk to me to make me realize some things."

Like the fact that I'm in love with you.

"I'm... no good with that."

"Try! And I promise I'll try to understand."

Once again, he seemed so hesitant and lost. Like the sad, lonely Sousuke that always seemed to be somewhere deep down there, even if Kou was trying to make that part of him go away. Turning onto his side fully, the boy brought his knees closer to his chest.

"I need something to remember this by... because if I end up alone again, it'll all feel like a lie. I need a proof. Something I can see and touch."

What?

"If you end up alone again...?" Kou repeated with disbelief.

"I know what I'm like. Cocky. Sarcastic. Loud, self-centred, fake-nice, my moods swing easily and I'm obsessed with my camera," he said with a forced smile. "That's me. I won't be surprised if I-"

"Did I ever give you any reason to doubt me?" Kou asked, squeezing his hand.

"Huh?" Suddenly, his eyes were wide open in confusion.

"What makes you think I'd leave you?"

"What? No, that's... I-I'm..." He stuttered out, but failed to actually make a sentence.

Turning to the side too, to actually face him properly, Kou reached out with his free hand to brush away the stray hair from his face.

"I'm staying with you. I'm never ever leaving you behind."

"E-Even if we end up in a different class again?"

"Even then."

"Even though I'm like this, and I'm not going to change?"

"Why would I want that? I told you to just be yourself."

"But I-" It seemed like he couldn't really find the right words, so he just continued to stare at him with a pleading expression and teary eyes. "Kou..."

"You don't need to take photos when I'm right here," he said with a grin, all hesitation gone from his mind. "So, let's just always be together, Sousuke."

"You can't just say it! Are you insane?!" Sousuke exclaimed, sitting back up, as if he couldn't look him in the eyes anymore. "You can't..."

"Why?" Kou followed him. "Don't you want this, too?"

"It's not that easy! You don't get it!" He replied, looking flustered beyond belief. "I... probably want way more than I should be asking for!"

"Ask anyway!"

"Literally how am I supposed to ask you to love me? It doesn't work like that!" Sousuke blurted out, then immediately clasped his free hand over his mouth, the instant regret clearly visible.

Kou just blinked in surprise. Out of every possible thing to say, he didn't expect this. Since Nene said Sousuke most likely liked him back, he wasn't too worried about this part, but...

Why was he so scared of asking for something he already had?

“Forget what I just sai-”

“Well, you are cocky. And sarcastic.”

“Huh?”

“But somehow, I think you’re fun,” Kou said, only just getting started. “You are loud, but I don’t like silence anyway, it’s boring. That’s why I prefer it when you don’t pretend. Your mood swings aren’t even that hard to deal with. You’re underestimating me! You are obsessed with your camera, but it’s your passion after all. What kind of friend would I be if I didn’t support it? And self-centred? I actually wish you loved yourself more, because I know you don’t, even if you try to make it look like that.”

“W-What’s with you telling me all of this?!”

“Because you’re stupid, and also stupidly cute, and I like you!” He exclaimed, feeling his face grow hotter. “I love having you around, so... stop looking at me... like you’re sure I’m gonna reject you...”

“You... You’re not?” Sousuke muttered, looking even more lost than just a moment ago.

“Did you even listen to everything I just said?!”

“I did! I did, but it just doesn’t make any sense to me!” He said shakily, raising the free hand to wipe at his eyes with the hoodie sleeve.

“...what should I say to make it make sense, then?” This really was going to cost him so much embarrassment, but in the end, that never really stopped him before, right? He was someone who always charged right ahead. He reached up, to his right ear, to take the traffic-safety earring off and put it to the side. “Mitsuba Sousuke!”

“W-Why are you shouting, all of sudden? And why did you take that off?”

“Didn’t you say you’re not interested in people with lame earrings? And I’m shouting so you can hear me properly!” He replied, his heart beating so loudly that he was almost sure Sousuke could hear it too. “I’m in love with you! Will you go out with me? Does it make sense when I put it like this?”

...

To his surprise, Sousuke laughed weakly, even though he looked like he was trying really hard to stop himself from crying once again this day.

“Not even a little... but... you can’t take it back anymore. Even if you also have no idea what you’re saying.”

“But I know what I’m saying! I’m hundred percent sure of it!”

“Then close your eyes for a moment,” he said, placing his hand on Kou’s face.

“Eh? But why?”

“Just do as I tell you! And don’t you dare peek, I’ll smack you!” He added, pinching his cheek a little.

Kou knew better than to think Sousuke was joking, so he just gave up, closed his eyes and waited. He could feel him move closer, they were trapped together in a way that no movement of one of them could escape the other, but... for a moment, nothing happened. He was about to open one eye and try to peek, but...

“I can do this,” Sousuke whispered, probably to himself. “I can do this...”

The next moment, the hand moved from Kou’s cheek to the back of his neck, and Sousuke gently pulled him forward. A second later, there was a ghost of warm breath on his face, and finally, something soft touched his lips, with the minimum of pressure.

It was over before he could react in any way though.

“What was this...?” Kou asked, opening his eyes to face the furiously blushing Sousuke.

“Huh? Can’t you t-tell? A kiss, obviously! You must feel so pleased with the fact that a boy as cute as me would even consider kissing you, l-let alone do it, you pervert!” He stuttered out, avoiding looking him in the eyes.

Kou raised his hand to touch his own lips, still feeling them tingle, and suddenly his face felt so hot that it probably matched Sousuke’s, in how red it was.

“I-If anything, that makes you the pervert! S-Since it was you who kissed me...”

“Oh,” he uttered, which made things even more awkward.

“I-I don’t really mind it though...” Kou added quickly, finally making Sousuke look at him from under his bangs.

“You better not, because this was my first kiss. I don’t want to end up giving it away for nothing, I have standards,” he muttered. “Wait... giving it away... offering it to someone?”

With a puzzled expression, he reached inside the pocket of the hoodie he was wearing, pulling out a scrap of paper that Kou recognized as the note he was given by the photography club members. Back then, he didn’t even get to see what was written on it, since it caused Sousuke to run away crying and he completely forgot about it...

“We can only steal this much, the memories you try so hard to preserve in physical form. We cannot steal your heart though. Only you can offer it to someone,” he read out loud. “I hope Yugi Amate is ready to pay for his crimes, because the price is going to be high. I’m not sure what I’ll do to him yet, but I’m sure I’ll come up with something, and you’re going to help me. But before that...”

Throwing the note away to the side, he gave him the smile that always seemed so blinding, and yet he couldn't look away.

"I like you, Kou, and yes, I'll go out with you," he said. "But if you end up being a disappointing boyfriend, I won't hesitate to dump you, with your lame earring or without it."

"Thank god, you're finally back to being yourself."

"What is this supposed to mean?!"

"Nothing. I really like you, too," Kou laughed. "Does that mean you stole my heart? Or did I give it to you myself?"

"Oh god, you're so cheesy. Never say anything like that again," Sousuke replied, but he couldn't hide his smile. Sometimes he was just so easy to read.

"Sure, but you'll have to kiss me again in exchange. For real this time."

"Wha- You really are a pervert, aren't you? With us still handcuffed like this, you could do literally anything to me and I wouldn't be able to defend myself because I'm so cute and weak--"

"Will I get that kiss or not?" Kou asked, ignoring that, just as he normally would, and if Sousuke's blush was slowly going away, it instantly came back.

"J-Just one more, don't get too greedy," he mumbled, then tugged at Kou's shirt to pull him closer again.

And Kou really didn't know how kissing worked (neither did Sousuke), but he quickly realized he didn't mind learning, if it meant with him. It was awkward, at first. He even laughed a little when their noses bumped together, but when Sousuke tried to pull away after that, he just pressed their lips together again, making him let out a small noise of surprise.

He never imagined kissing would actually be fun, but when they finally broke the kiss, flushed and a little breathless, he felt some special kind of satisfaction.

"Does this make good enough of a memory?" He asked quietly.

"Who knows. Maybe you'll have to refresh it," Sousuke replied with a barely suppressed grin. "You get a pass now, but you'll have to do better next time."

The fact that he already had a next time planned was enough.

Like this, Minamoto Kou let the criminal they were chasing get away, confessed his feelings, experienced his first, and second kiss on the school rooftop, under the setting sun... while handcuffed to the boy he liked. And also apparently started dating him.

All of this, and they still couldn't get out.

“Hey, Yashiro.” Amane tried to get Nene’s attention while watering the vegetables she pointed at. Sometimes he’d help her out, out of lack of anything better to do.

“What is it?” She asked, looking at him.

“I want a kiss,” he said, pointing at his lips and making a duckface. “I’ve been good the entire day, I deserve it.”

“H-Huh?! Why now, a-all of sudden?” Nene stuttered out, almost dropping her watering can.

Amane just grinned at her.

“No reason, just felt like it. Can I not even ask for a kiss from my beautiful girlfriend?”

“D-Don’t we have something more important to think about? When do you think should we let Kou-kun and Mitsuba-kun out?”

The boy just put his own, now empty watering can on the ground and looked up, in the direction of the rooftop. It’s been a while, but he didn’t really know how long it’d take them to sort out their business, and he wasn’t about to let them go before they did. He’d had enough of them dancing around each other. If the kids were going to ditch them to go on dates, they should at least call them dates. They just needed a little push. Kou needed someone to get through how dense he could be, and Mitsuba... someone to get him out of his head for a moment.

“You think they’re already done making out?” He just said out loud.

“W-Wha-” Nene let out, then just swung her can towards him, splashing him with water. “Mitsuba-kun was right with calling you a pervert!”

“Gaah, stop, stop! It’s still cold in wet clothes in the evening! I just think that’s a likely development, they’re both healthy teenage boys!”

“Go let them out, right now!”

“Fine, I will, just put it down!” Amane exclaimed, trying to run from the flying water. “When I’m back, will I get a kiss?”

“I... I’ll think about it!”

This already meant he won.

Chapter End Notes

so, we got here! the point to which this entire fic was leading. to everyone who's been reading it until now - thank you so much! there's still one chapter left, it serves as sort of

a conclusion/epilogue for this fic (and lets me give them some more cute moments), but the investigation ends here. who was the actual culprit here, i wonder $\gamma(\overline{\omega})\gamma$

the lesson learned

Chapter Notes

aaand here we go, our epilogue!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When they heard the sound of the key turning in the lock again, they were just laying on the floor, trying to find some comfortable position despite their limitations. They didn't talk much after the confessions, and... everything else.

Sousuke's face still felt hot just thinking about it. It really wasn't how he expected that day to go. He... really didn't expect any day to go like that, if he was being honest. It felt sort of surreal, to know that... the boy he fell for loved him back.

Even though they were finally free to leave, they didn't really feel like chasing after Amane to kick his ass now. At some point Sousuke even almost fell asleep, curled up on the dirty floor, with Kou drawing circles on the back of his hand with his thumb. When they finally got up, they found out that Amane was even nice enough to bring them their bags and leave them near the door, but on the other hand, he kept the key, leaving them stuck together even longer. They were lucky it wasn't the only key, and Kou still had a spare one at home. Sousuke was supposed to come over anyway, so this wasn't a big issue... When it came to the stolen things, they left them hidden there, under the tile, deciding to deal with them the next day.

Sousuke also found one last note in his own bag.

Congratulations on finding the treasure we stole, and also stealing one yourself. Take good care of this one for us.

~ Yugi Amane & Yashiro Nene

For a moment he wondered if he should keep it, as a memory of this whole wild hunt, and *this* especially, but...

In the end, he crumpled the note and threw it into the nearest trash can. The thing he should treasure the most after today wasn't some scrap of paper, but the person who decided that putting up with Sousuke was an honor to him.

“Welcome back, Kou-nii!” Tiara called out, like always running to greet her brother. “Ah, Mitsuba-chan! Are you going to stay for dinner this time too?”

“What, do you want me to go home, Tiara-chan?” He asked with a tired laugh. After everything that happened, he was too exhausted to tease the kid too much.

“Nuh uh, I like it when Mitsuba-chan stays!” She replied cheerfully, and Sousuke’s heart felt warm. Even if the oldest Minamoto didn’t like him, he was still welcome there. “Why are you two wearing these things though?”

Oh. The handcuffs.

“That’s... a long story, Tiara,” Kou sighed. “Don’t tell Teru-nii anything.”

“Sure!” She nodded.

“Sousuke will probably stay the night too, since it’s already pretty late, so if you want to watch a movie with us or something, just say so.”

“Tiara is busy drawing, so not this time!” The girl said. “And Sousuke is Mitsuba-chan’s name, right? So... Sou-chan!”

“Hey, that’s a little-” He tried to protest, but Kou started laughing.

“S-Sou-chan... That’s way too cute for this guy!”

“Shut it or you’ll regret your next words,” Sousuke hissed at him, the raised his left hand. “Also, can we just finally get rid of these? I can’t even look at this anymore.”

“R-Right! Come on, I have the key in my room.”

Not even two minutes later, his hand was finally free, and even though he was relieved about it, at the same time it felt a little off.

“I’m never bringing these to school again,” Kou said, flopping onto his bed. “Not risking it. Next time he’d cuff me to someone like Aoi-senpai and then what?”

“He’d probably sooner break them using brute strength than risk Akane-senpai seeing it,” Sousuke snorted, lying down next to him. Finally something more comfortable. “How about we cuff Pervert-senpai to someone instead?”

“I think that’d be more of a punishment for that person, not Amane,” he replied, clearly amused. He turned to the side to face him, so Sousuke did the same. “You said something about helping with dinner, right?”

“This feels like ages ago. Are you really going to make me help you after everything I went through today?” He whined, but Kou only poked at his ribs mercilessly.

“Yeah, because I went through all of that with you. Move your ass if you want to eat.”

“Are you threatening me? Are you threatening your boyfriend of less than two hours?” Sousuke teased, not even expecting much of a reaction, but the blush blooming on Kou’s cheeks was so satisfying. He did this. Just by calling himself his boyfriend. And he could do this, because it was the truth. They were dating now.

“I’m not threatening you, dumbass! Just telling you not to be a freeloader!” Kou replied, sitting up and trying to pull Sousuke to do the same. “Come on, didn’t you not want to be carried?”

“Oh, that was before. Now, go ahead.” He grinned, reaching out to him, as if he seriously expected to get picked up and carried, but Kou just gave him a look saying that he’d had enough of his bullshit for one day. *Fair enough.*

“You’re going to walk to the kitchen on your own two legs or you get no dessert.”

“How did I even fall for you? You’re the worst.”

“So you are. Come on, lazy ass.”

In the end, he didn’t even make him do much, like always. Kou always acted as if putting something sharp in his hand could end in a disaster, so he was stuck with stirring duty, and even if he cried about being used as a servant... he sort of liked this. What did people call this? Domestic?

Teru came around the usual time, and they even all ate dinner together. Maybe he had a good day and bullied that Aoi guy enough, because he didn’t even glare at Sousuke that much. Or maybe it was because Kou said he helped with the food, and because Tiara kept enthusiastically asking him to look at her drawings, which totally sucked but he obviously wouldn’t say that to a kindergarten kid. Who knows, maybe in the future she’d develop more of an artistic sense than her brother.

Everything seemed too good somehow. The fact that his mom didn’t have anything against him staying at Kou’s place, and even offered to pick him up in the morning so he could get ready for school, how Kou had to lend him his clothes yet again, how they were now sitting on his bed, with Kou trying to put on some movie on his laptop...

“Oh, it works! Sorry, I never know with this thing, it’s so old,” he said, finally putting it on a chair near his bed and sitting back next to him. “You look like you’re about to fall asleep any moment anyway though.”

“I’m doing just great,” Sousuke muttered, resting his head on his shoulder. His hair was still damp from the shower, so there’s no way he could sleep yet, because the Minamoto household apparently had never heard of a hairdryer. “Besides... what, you’re not even going to cuddle with me? Now that you can? You suck...”

“I-It’s not that I don’t want to!” Kou replied quickly. “I just... don’t really know... how much is okay. Also, I didn’t realize you’re this clingy.”

Clingy? Was he really? He couldn't really tell. It's not like there was ever anyone worth clinging to.

"Am I..." *too much*? He wanted to ask, but the words were stuck in his throat. Maybe he was still a little afraid... of being abandoned, of the person he cared about getting tired of him and deciding he's more trouble than he's worth...

"N-No, that's not what I meant!" Kou protested, moving the arm Sousuke was leaning on to wrap it around him instead. Still flustered, but encouraged nonetheless, he swung his legs over Kou's lap and wrapped his arms around his neck. "You really like it this much...?"

"If I didn't, I wouldn't be doing this, idiot," he muttered, feeling Kou hug him more tightly, so he did the same.

Sousuke never realized all of this would be so embarrassing at first, but... he was so happy. He had never been this comfortable with another person touching him before, not counting his mom. Earlier, for a long time, touch was sharp pushes and hair pulling, typical bully behavior... and of course, like anyone, he didn't like pain, so he preferred not to be touched at all, even though he was actually sort of touch starved.

But this - this was something he wanted. Kou never crossed any lines, even when Sousuke pushed his luck, and he could be gentle with him, too. Like right now. Sousuke was tired, Kou was warm, held him in just the right way, and he felt so safe like this...

"Hey, weren't you supposed not to fall asleep yet?" Kou laughed, his nose buried in Sousuke's hair, and normally he'd make some comment about him being a pervert for taking this opportunity to smell him, but all he managed now was a whiny hum. "Enough playing tough, go to sleep. I'll leave you the bed and just take the futon... but you'll have to move for that."

"Mhm, let me think about it..." He mumbled, smiling sleepily. "Nope."

"What is this supposed to mean?"

Well, Sousuke was not about to ask him to just share the bed, but that's what it was supposed to mean, so he just stayed like that, without moving.

"What are you, a cat?" Kou finally sighed, then attempted to move him himself, but that only ended with them shifting around on the bed until they were both more or less lying down, with Sousuke draping himself all over him. "...was this your plan all along?"

"So what? You're gonna push me off? Move to the floor? You wouldn't do that, right?" He snickered.

"I give up! Can I at least close the laptop?"

"It'll turn itself off on its own."

"So high maintenance," Kou said, but still moved his hand to run his fingers through Sousuke's hair. "So soft... What shampoo do you normally use?"

“What kind of question is this even? Creep.”

“Dunno, I was just curious.”

“Weirdo. My hair is naturally soft. There’s no way to save yours by imitating me.”

This small talk went on for a while, but the longer it lasted, the less Sousuke’s sleepy mind was registering. He didn’t even realize when Kou pulled the blanket over them, and only vaguely felt him press a kiss to his forehead. There was a chance he said something really stupid in that state, but it’s not like he was going to remember it in the morning, so he could let himself babble some nonsense. Kou wasn’t going to remember either, and it was alright.

They could always repeat it some other day, if they felt like it.

The next day, Teru was the one to wake them up, and Kou was never this grateful for his brother’s tendency to discuss things in private, rather than address them right away. Sousuke already seemed tense during breakfast, so Kou preferred to receive *that talk* alone. He knew that Sousuke and Teru didn’t really like each other, but... there had to be a way to reach a peaceful outcome, right?

There was also something really nice about waking up with Sousuke’s head on his chest, as he cuddled against his side, even if he was somewhat heavy. It also turned out he was extremely grumpy in the morning, which was equally endearing and irritating... though Kou vaguely remembered him muttering something cute while half-asleep. What it was, that he didn’t know anymore.

Kou also soon found out that not that much actually changed since yesterday, which was a relief, because... he liked how they were before, so most of that didn’t have to change. Rather than a change, it was just a shift in a different direction. Sousuke was still insufferable in the way typical to him, but it was as if Kou learned to see something more in that. They were still yelling at each other over small things, but also held hands under the desk during lunch break, pretending not to see the looks Satou and Yokoo were giving them and acting as if this was a secret between them, when it was clearly not.

All the stolen items were apparently returned to their respective clubs without anyone noticing anything - most likely yesterday, after they already went home. Each club also received a written apology, without any sort of signature. Kou and Sousuke had nothing to do with this case anymore, and the Phantom Thieves of Memories retired, never revealing their identities to the public. Aside from the culprits and the detectives, barely anyone else knew what happened.

Suddenly, all of that seemed much smaller than just a day ago, and it looked like their school was about to become peaceful again. Well, at least as long as Tsukasa was stuck with supplementary classes.

Still, not everything was said and done yet, and that’s why they were now standing in front of the door to the girls’ bathroom on the third floor.

“You sure this is a good idea?” Sousuke asked, squeezing his hand a little.

“Weren’t you so eager to kick Amane’s ass yourself?”

“You know well I can’t do this, lame earring. I’m too cute for that!”

“Okay, I’ll do it then,” Kou said with a grin. “First talking, then ass-kicking.”

With that, he pulled him inside, where just as they expected, Amane and Nene were waiting for them, sitting on the windowsill. When they entered, the girl jumped down to the floor, pulling her boyfriend to do the same.

“Come on, Amane-kun! You know what you’re supposed to do!” She said, before Kou or Sousuke could even utter a word.

“Right, right...” Amane replied, then turned to them and took one step forward, looking pretty embarrassed. “First of all... I need to apologize. I did some pretty insensitive stuff over the past week. I had good intentions, but... that’s not an excuse, right?”

“At least you know that,” Sousuke muttered, still clearly displeased.

“Come now, Mitsuba-kun!” The other boy waved his hands. “Didn’t it all turn out for the best? Look at the two of you now.”

“Wait, did you really plan all this?” Kou asked, switching between looking at Sousuke and then at Amane. “To get us together?”

“No other motive involved!” Amane admitted cheerfully. “And I think I at least deserve to know what’s the final outcome of my efforts.”

“Oh, sure,” he said with a nod, raising his and Sousuke’s joined hands. “We’re dating now!”

“He really didn’t deserve this knowledge!” His boyfriend replied, his face growing red very quickly. “I still haven’t forgiven him!”

“I’m sorry too, Mitsuba-kun.” Nene joined the conversation as well. “I was helping him the whole time, after all...”

“Radish-senpai... Did he force you into this?”

“Are you really that mad at me? Come on, Mitsuba-kun, let’s be friends again!”

“Go to hell, you absolute degenerate. I could tell the teachers on you if I wanted,” Sousuke threatened, but Amane just grinned mischievously.

“But you won’t. You owe me too much.”

“You...!”

“Calm down, everyone! I’m sure we can solve this in a different way than arguing!” Nene said, obviously distressed. “Uhm... Let’s play some game! We have cards! Kou-kun, please, say something...”

“I’m sorry, senpai, but I’m on Sousuke’s side with this one. Let’s take this to the backyard, Amane.”

“Violence is not an answer!”

“Well, I doubt Kou could defeat your perverted boyfriend in a battle of wits, so this is all we have.”

In this whole mess, they didn’t even realize when the door to the bathroom opened.

“Are you brats aware that you’re only being left alone to camp here because you’re expected to behave yourselves?! You’re not alone in this school, and you’re screaming way too loud!” A new voice joined them, making them yell even louder.

“Tsuchigomori-sensei!”

“It’s the spider guy!”

“Run, Yashiro, we can’t get caught like this after everything we’ve done!”

“Let’s go!” Kou simply pulled him towards the exit, quickly passing by the teacher standing there and leaving the bathroom, with Sousuke running right behind him. He couldn’t hear Nene and Amane’s steps, so they probably went in the opposite direction.

“Where are we even going!?”

“Somewhere! If we’re not fighting Amane today... how about we go on a date?”

“Haaah? D-Do you even have any plan or did you just blurt it out?”

“No plans! I have some money though, so I can treat you to ice cream!” Kou exclaimed, giving him a grin over his shoulder, only to see him smile too, just before he made an annoyed face again.

“Is that all you’ve got? Lamel!”

“So, you don’t want to?”

“This is not what I said! I want to!”

“Then it’s decided!”

Maybe it wasn’t the most romantic first date, and it didn’t really differ from the things they’d usually do, but maybe this actually suited them the best. And when Sousuke pulled at his hand to make him stop for a moment, only to look at him shyly before leaning in for a quick kiss... he couldn’t say he wasn’t happy with the things that were new, too, because...

He felt that as long as they were together, everything was going to be fine. Weird how someone he didn't even know for all that long could become someone he couldn't imagine his life without, but...

Maybe that's what that part with stealing a heart was about.

Chapter End Notes

so. that's it! i hope that's cute enough of an ending, because they deserve the best ♡✧(
◡•v•)

i hope to write more for mitsukou in the future bc i love them so much, but for now, to everyone who read this story, thank you!! all the kudos and comments made me really happy and i'm glad i could share this with you ~ ヽ(^ ▽ ^)

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